



DEBENHAM'S VOW

AMELIA ANN BLANFORD EDWARDS

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BY

Blandford
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
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PROLOGUE.—A.D. 1842.

IN a tiny way-side inn, at the head of one of the wildest passes of the Snowdon range, a traveler lay dying. An invalid on his first arrival there some six or eight weeks before, he had been slowly fading ever since; and now, toward dusk, to the low wailing of the wind, and the soft incessant patter of the rain, was passively drifting away. His wife sat by his pillow, as she had been sitting since mid-day, listening in an agony of apprehension for his every breath. His child, a tall pale boy of some eight years of age, lay coiled in a big arm-chair beside the half-opened window, watching the changing mists and thickening twilight. Neither spoke. In the house all was silent. There were no drovers at the tap, no wayfarers in the parlor, no wheels upon the road. The coach has passed long since, bringing neither passengers nor letters; and save a monotonous dull sound of wood-chopping in some yard close by, and now and then the bark of a sheep-dog far away, no token of life was audible about the place.

It was a low, large room, fronting west; the ceiling intersected by one heavy, black beam; the window lozenge-paned; the floor sunken and uneven. A four-post bedstead, from which the hangings had been removed, stood in one corner, and near it a smaller bed for the child.

A few varnished prints in black frames hung over the mantle-piece. A dilapidated easy-chair, a huge Elizabethan chest with ponderous clasps and handles, a small square of faded carpet in the middle of the floor, some rush-bottomed chairs, and a rickety Pembroke table, made up the total of the furniture. Poor as it was—and it could not well be poorer—this lodging might by no means be classed with “the worst inn’s worst room.” The remoter Welsh hosteleries are sufficiently comfortless to this day, but they lagged still farther in the rear of English progress some twenty or thirty years ago. A landlord who stammered a dozen words of *Sassenach*, a landlady acquainted with the properties of *Bohea*, a bedroom which the traveler was not called upon to share with some stranger whose tongue was as unintelligible to him, and whose habits were as barbarous, as those of a South Sea islander, were then people and conditions not only rare to find, but, in certain mountain districts, wholly unknown. The room, in short, was an exceptionally good room, and the inn an exceptionally good inn, as those times went; and the occupants thereof, being provided with the actual necessities of life, had reason to be well satisfied.

Something was there for grace, however, as well as for necessity—a large dish filled with wild flowers and mosses; a few well-worn but richly-bound books; and an antique silver inkstand, elaborately chased. These, apparently, were the property of the travelers; for the dish was of the rarest Gubbio ware, lustrous with gold and purple, and the book-plate in the book, and the lid of the inkstand, were engraved alike with a stately coat of arms. Theirs also were the boxes and portmanteaus piled together in a distant corner; the garments hanging on the door; the song-bird silent in his cage.

To a practiced observer certain of these trifles might have told a whole history of well-born poverty and homeless wandering. Only the dwellers in tents carry their household gods from camp to camp.

Such was the interior of the room, growing momentarily dimmer in the coming dusk. The scene without was scarcely less gloomy. It had been raining for several days without intermission, and the water lay in troubled pools about the road and yard. The sky was low and leaden, and hung like a dense curtain over the mountains which here closed round in every direction, leaving only their lower slopes obscurely visible. The wind came and went with long sighs, like the breath of one in pain. A few last leaves fluttered shivering down now and then from the solitary ash-tree at the door.

In the air was a confused murmur, as of the rushing of many torrents; and the barren, boulder-strewn flats which stretched away from the head of the pass to the brink of the little heron-haunted tarn some three-quarters of a mile farther up, were almost wholly under water.

And all this time the rain poured on, beating a monotonous measure on the roof of the inn, and dripping mournfully from the eaves above the sick man's window.

Presently, for the first time in several hours, he uttered a faint moan. It was little more than a sigh, and scarcely audible; but it thrilled both listeners like a trumpet-call. The boy started to his feet, pale and shivering. The mother held up a trembling finger.

"Hush!" she whispered. "His lips move—he may speak."

They knew that he was dying. They knew also that hope was past. The doctor, who came all the way from Corwen, and was anxious to spare both his pony and his time, had dismissed himself the night before, bluntly declaring that the patient had not a dozen hours to live. But twenty hours had dragged by since then, and still, with half-closed eyes and parted lips, and a pulse growing feebler with every passing minute, he lingered.

Again he moaned. Again his lips stirred feebly.

The boy crept to his mother's knee. She, watching that white unconscious face with a passionate eagerness that might almost have

called it back to life, wiped the damp brow, put aside the scattered locks, and waited breathlessly.

Such a young face as it was, too, to have death written on it so legibly! Prematurely worn, and lined, and gray; but still young, still handsome, still instinct with a sort of pathetic dignity that not even approaching death had power to efface. He was only thirty-three years of age, and had been sickly from boyhood. Disappointment, reverse of fortune, exile, privation, were alike familiar to him. Young as he was, he had suffered bitterly; but the time for suffering was now almost gone by, and everlasting peace was at hand.

"If it were but one word—only one!"

It was as though her supplication were answered. A faint shiver swept over the pallid face. The languid hand became suddenly contracted. He looked up, and, not so much uttering the word as shaping it with his lips, asked for "water."

She gave it to him steadily, tearlessly. Her hand did not even tremble. And yet she had thought never to see those lips move or those eyes open again. Then she asked if he had slept.

"Yes," he murmured, faintly, "I have slept—and dreamed."

"Dreamed, my dear love?"

He closed his eyes affirmatively.

"Of—of the old place," he said.

"Of Benhampton?"



"HIS MOTHER DREW HIS HEAD TO HER BOSOM, KISSED HIM, WEPT OVER HIM, CLUNG TO HIM."

"Ay—of Benhampton. I seemed to see it so plainly."

She looked in his face with a wan smile.

"Benhampton is but a name to me," she said; "and yet I seem to see it plainly too—when you speak of it."

He sighed, and relapsed, apparently, into unconsciousness. How like death he looked and lay! How faint and far between was the coming of each feeble respiration! The wife hung over him, daring neither to speak nor stir. The boy stood by, weeping silently. And still the rain dripped, dripped, dripped from the eaves outside the window, like minute drops from a clepsydra, pitilessly telling off the last moments of a life condemned. He presently spoke again.

"You remember?" he whispered.

"I remember, Reginald."

"In the chapel—at Benhampton—under the north window."

"Yes, dearest, yes."

He pressed her hand. His strength was ebbing fast, and his voice became each moment less articulate.

"Tell me—once more," he faltered. "Do you forgive?"

"Forgive! Oh, my dear love, what have I to forgive? Nothing—nothing—nothing!"

He looked at her, and a strange light, as of a smile in which the lips had no part, came upon his face like a glory.

"God bless you!" he said, brokenly. "God bless you—wife and child!"

The light faded; the breath died away; the clasped fingers fell apart.

What next? He must surely move, look up, speak again! There was no change within the last few seconds? Nothing was gone—nothing was hushed? It could not be that his heart had ceased from beating! Was it the dusk only, or had a cold gray tint stolen suddenly upon his features like a veil? Gracious Heaven! was this the end? Was this death?

Seized by a nameless terror, the child broke all at once into a passion of sobs.

"Take me away!" he cried. "Oh, take me away!"

But his mother, instead of taking him away, drew his head to her bosom, kissed him, wept over him, clung to him. He was her all, now. In the whole wide world she had nothing to love, nothing to hope for, nothing to rejoice in, to serve, to suffer for, but this one fragile, fatherless boy.

She knelt down beside the bed, still holding him fast locked within her arms, and prayed aloud—a poor, broken, artless supplication, which he, in his childish way, repeated sentence by sentence. Then came those words, whose very cadence echoes with the sorrow of ages—"Thy will be done."

"*Thy will be done!*" Only four words; and yet what a history is theirs! Alas! what scars they cover! What tears they consecrate! What broken hearts, and darkened lives, and ruined homes they grow over and sanctify, like sweet flowers over graves! Can resignation, humility, fortitude, go farther than this? What heroic phrase of all the olden time, what golden saying of patriot, philosopher, or poet, breathes such high courage? What more has Heaven to ask, or man to give?

CHAPTER I.

ST. HILDEGARDE THE MARTYR.

FAR east of Temple Bar, beyond St. Paul's, beyond the Mansion House, beyond the Bank, beyond the uttermost landmark entered in Belgravian charts, stands, and has stood for nearly a thousand years, the ancient church of St. Hildegarde the Martyr. Buried deep in the heart of that intricate quarter where streets are narrowest, traffic densest, population scantiest, this tiny building is only remarkable in so far as it is one of the smallest churches in one of the smallest parishes of the City of London. Other fame or interest it has none. It is neither curious, nor beautiful, nor historical. It is enriched by no stately monuments, by no wealth of sculptured stone, carved oak, or painted glass. It is simply very small and very old—a church without a congregation in a parish without inhabitants. So hidden is it in a net-work of by-ways, that one might pass daily within a dozen yards of St. Hildegarde the Martyr without so much as suspecting its existence. Huge warehouses hem it in on every side. Round and about it from dawn till dusk a sluggish, thunderous tide of heavy traffic ebbs and flows. One window, crusted with the grime of centuries, looks upon a narrow thoroughfare leading dockward; the rest stare blankly into a court surrounded by stores and counting-houses, where in summer no sunbeam ever penetrates, and in winter the gas burns all day long. Through this court, by means of a passage tunneled under the warehouses, the church of St. Hildegarde is approached from the busy world without. A quaint, out-of-the-way nook; populous by day; a desert when business hours are past—now vibrating to the rush and roll of wheels, traversed by innumerable feet, and echoing to the discords of many voices—now wrapped in a Sabbath-like stillness; every door locked, every window shuttered up, every clerk and porter gone. Entering it thus on a summer's evening, when the sky is yet full of light, and the far-away parks are at their gayest, and the river close by is all alive with steamers, the solitude of the place has in it something both strange and solemn. It is as if one had come upon a city of the dead.

On such a summer evening, in the pleasant month of June, in the year of our Lord 1860, one of the church windows being partly open and the church door standing ajar, the little court, then at its stillest, was filled with an irregular sound of chanting—a sound as of hymns begun, broken off, repeated; responses continuously sung, and canticles from both services indiscriminately succeeding each other. This lasted for perhaps three-quarters of an hour. Then came a pause; then a pattering and scrambling, as of little feet heavily shod; and then the door was dragged suddenly open, and an impatient flock of school-children came trooping out. They were about a score in number. Some of the boys wore quaint little gray coats turned up with dirty yellow, and muffin caps of the same; but both boys and girls, for the most part, were dressed in their home clothes, and looked untidy enough. Crowding together for a moment on the threshold, they paused and looked back.

"At half past ten, then, on Sunday morning," said a voice within.

"Yes, Sir: half past ten, Sir," replied some six or eight shrill voices.

"Not one minute later, remember."

"No, Sir. Oh no, Sir!"

And with this, being finally dismissed, they broke loose into the court, laughing, hallooing, flinging caps into the air, chasing each other into corners, and vanishing presently under the dark arch leading to the world of streets beyond.

When the last straggler had disappeared, and the last shout had died away, a young man came to the threshold; stood there for a moment, bare-headed, with the cavernous gloom of the doorway behind him and the evening light upon his face; drank in a deep breath of cool air; cast a wistful glance toward the glowing patch of sky over the housetops; and then, half-reluctantly, turned back into the church.

He shut the door and locked it from the inside, waking a desolate echo through the empty nave. Within all was twilight, except where twilight deepened into profound shadow. The topmost leaves of a solitary tree close outside the east window showed like bronze against the sky. Here and there, making the darkness darker, as it were, by contrast, a faint gleam stole along the walls, rested on altar, rail, and pulpit, and glanced upon the pipes of the tiny organ standing back in an obscure corner by the vestry door.

Unsightly and insignificant without, the church of St. Hildegarde was no less unlovely within. It measured, perhaps, a hundred feet in length by about forty in width; and, excepting only a certain unmistakable look of age, resembled nothing so nearly as a plain, ill-lighted lecture-hall or corn-exchange in a provincial town. The bare stone walls, unskillfully daubed with bands of rough color, were blotched with mildew, and hung in places with common illuminated cards. Rows of rush-bottomed *prie-dieu* chairs filled the body of the church. The ceiling just above the communion-table was painted blue, and stuck over with little stars of cut paper, most of which had fallen away, while the rest, half-detached, hung fluttering overhead. A gilt heart and a few wreaths and crosses of *immortelles* were suspended over the altar; and in an antique-looking piscina close by lay a scrap of crochet work, on which stood a small glass jug crusted with dregs of sacramental wine. A dismal place to be alone in toward dusk. Dismal for its silence—dismal for its solitude—dismal, above all, for the poverty that betrayed itself in every shabby fitting and tawdry decoration.

The young man who had just locked himself in there, however, with the gathering shadows was used to the little church, and indifferent to its dreariness. For him it was neither silent nor solitary—for him it echoed to noble sounds, and was peopled with the spirits of Handel and Beethoven and Mozart. He was a musician—very young, very poor, very much in love with his art, and parochial organist, with a salary of twenty-five pounds a year.

Considering that he lived at Islington, a good three miles from St. Hildegarde the Martyr; that his rector was an Oxford man, with High-Church proclivities; and that, besides the orthodox three services on Sunday, he had to play an early service every morning, and an extra eleven o'clock service on saints' days and fast days, it must be

admitted that this young man was not overpaid with twenty-five pounds a year. He was not dissatisfied, however. He was even contented. Granted that the salary was light, he was none the less willing that the duty should be heavy. He looked upon it as "good practice," and upon himself as a particularly fortunate fellow in being able to command it. And so he was, perhaps, *l'argent apart*. Musical talent is not at a premium, and young organists are plentiful in the market. When the situation fell vacant some eighteen months before, Temple Debenham, then just returned from the famous collegiate academy of Zollenstrasse-am-Main, and armed with a double first-class certificate countersigned by the Grand Duke himself, carried off the prize from more than thirty competitors. It was quite a triumph, as far as it went; and the salary, translated into florins, sounded sufficiently imposing when written about to fellow-students on the other side of the Channel. What wonder, then, that a clever, ambitious, inexperienced young fellow, who had never owned a spare thaler in his life, and who believed in his fellow-creatures as implicitly as he believed in himself, should mistake this very small victory for a brilliant omen, and fancy himself on the high-road to fame and fortune with twenty-five pounds a year?

Twenty-five pounds a year! Pshaw! it was not the pay that he valued; it was the position. Was it nothing to hold a responsible situation in a London church? Was it nothing to step at once into a ready-made connection? Was it nothing to be able to write "Organist of St. Hildegarde the Martyr" after one's name? Fancy it in print on the title-page of that prize cantata that gained such glory at Zollenstrasse the summer before last!

I have already said that Temple Debenham had been a disciple of the famous Grand Ducal Academy, and as his early history is comprised in half a dozen sentences, it may as well be told, and dismissed at once. He was the only son of a widow, and a musician born. Like baby Mozart, he spelled out harmonies upon every instrument that came within his reach before he had arrived at words of three syllables, and scrawled crotchets and quavers long enough ere his little hands had mastered the mysteries of pot-hooks and hangers. The gift grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength. It developed itself without culture, without opportunity, and in the face of a thousand difficulties. At length his vocation became so manifest that the widow began to cast about for some means of providing him with a sound musical education.

It chanced, however, that Mrs. Debenham was both poor and proud—so poor that, because food and lodging might there be had at less cost than in most other places, she lived with her boy in a tiny cottage in a tiny fishing village on the coast of the Isle of Anglesea; and so proud that, although she might have made acquaintances when she first came to St. Owen's, she did not know a soul in the neighborhood. Politely, but firmly, the widow declined to visit. She lived for her child alone. To watch over him, to amuse him, to work for him, to educate him, was her one absorbing occupation. He was her only companion, she his only play-fellow. With him she toiled through the arid wastes of the Eton Latin Grammar; for him did battle with Euclid and

Lemprière, and pursued with fainting steps the steep and difficult ways of the *Gradus ad Parnassum*. By-and-by, as the boy's vocation became more distinctly manifest, his mother fell into a very wilderness of hopes, doubts, and perplexities. 'That he, her child, should be gifted with a special gift.....she could scarcely believe it. She scarcely dared think of it. It made her heart beat, and not wholly with joy. There was fear in it, and anxiety, and perhaps a little—a very little—disappointment. It may be that Mrs. Debenham was not altogether fitted by previous training to take the loftiest view of an artistic career. It may be that, poor as she was, she had dreamed some dream of how her son might win his way to a university education, and so, ultimately, to the Church. For, of course, he was to be clever; that was only to be expected. He was to be very clever, and to achieve distinction in some way; but that he should be a genius, a heaven-born genius, was another matter. Mrs. Debenham had not been accustomed to geniuses, and was disposed to be somewhat afraid of them. Was not a musician a sort of gifted madman? Could a painter by any possibility be a gentleman? Might a gentleman, without loss of dignity, write poetry, unless in Greek or Latin? Was it quite certain that Shakspeare and Handel and Sir Joshua Reynolds paid their rent and went to church like other people? These were grave questions, and cost Mrs. Debenham many a tear and many a wakeful hour; but she was neither experienced enough, nor clever enough, to solve them.

In the mean while, the boy's talent waxed daily. He loved his mother's little old quavering piano as other lads love the play-ground or the cricket-match. To compose was as natural to him as to breathe, and to write what he composed was as easy as to play it. For him, as for all true musicians, sign and sound were one; and melody sprang from his pen as readily as from his fingers. At first he was not conscious of his gift. It came to him spontaneously, like song to a young bird, and he reveled in it with no thought beyond the gladness of the moment. But this could not go on forever; and his mother, who watched the rapid growing of his wings, trembled to think how he must some day discover his strength, and soar away into regions whither she would have no power to follow. And so it was. With time came the sense of power, and with the sense of power the dawn of purpose. Before he was twelve years of age he had determined to become a musician; and she, reluctantly, tremblingly, but with something of pride and wonder as well as of reluctance and trembling, had yielded to his wish.

Then it came to pass that Mrs. Debenham, while making such inquiry as was practicable in so remote a spot as St. Owen's, chanced to catch some far away echo of the fame of the great Academy at Zollenstrasse-am-Main. Here was an institution where an industrious student might make his prizes almost cover the cost of his college terms; where he would get not only a thorough professional training, but a good general education; and where, as an out-student, he might enjoy all these advantages without leaving the shelter of his mother's roof. And at Zollenstrasse, too, one might live even more cheap-

ly than at St. Owen's. At Zollenstrasse, it was confidently reported, a shilling would go farther than eighteenpence in Wales. At Zollenstrasse one might buy excellent wine for about sevenpence the bottle; meat for something like threepence half-penny a pound; fish, fruit, vegetables, milk, on almost nominal terms; and grapes in the vintage season at some such price as might have been asked by the proprietors of the Bottle Imp. To this land of promise, then, after much calculation of ways and means, and many hesitations, did the widow repair at last; and there resided with her son for a period extending over some eleven years, during which time the youth grew and prospered, became a capital German scholar, acquired something more than a smattering of the classics, and went in for every thing that the Academy had to offer in the way of musical advantages. Now it happened that music was the strong point, *par excellence*, at Zollenstrasse-am-Main. There were classes and masters for counterpoint; for orchestration; for singing; for every instrument under the sun, including, doubtless, the sackbut and shawm, had one been minded to learn them. A man, in short, who really meant work might do any thing at Zollenstrasse; and the student who failed to become thorough master of his profession had only himself to thank for his shortcomings.

But Temple Debenham did mean work. It was the one thing he had been hungering after at St. Owen's; and he flung himself into it with all the energy of a strong will and a resolute nature. He went under masters for the organ, the violin, and the piano. He joined the coral classes. He familiarized himself with the compass and resources of every instrument in the orchestra. He developed an insatiable curiosity for all the profounder secrets of the art; and, not content with acquiring harmony upon the Zollenstrasse system only, went back for himself to the earlier sources of the science—to the works of Martini, Tartini, Albrechtsberger, Pepusch, and other half-forgotten authors whose dusty volumes were rarely disturbed upon the shelves of the Academic Library. And the boy's indomitable industry flourished and bore fruit. At the end of his third year he took two medals; at the end of the fourth, a prize of two hundred florins, which was equivalent to about sixteen pounds of English money, and more than paid the fees of his fifth year. In the course of the fifth, he carried off the second gold medal; and in the sixth, a three-years' scholarship. By the time the scholarship had expired, he was senior student of music; and for the last two years of his college life held the rank of sub-professor of counterpoint, and second violin in the Grand Duke's private band.

When at length Temple Debenham had spent eleven years at Zollenstrasse, he suddenly announced his determination to go back to England. His friends and colleagues were agast. The professors remonstrated; his fellow-students remonstrated; his mother remonstrated. It was impossible that he could mean it. The thing was simply suicidal. His plain and obvious course was to throw his fortunes in with those of the Academy, and settle at Zollenstrasse for life. Would he not be a full professor ere long, with apartments in the college and eight hundred florins a year? Were not the professors allowed to take pupils, and would it not be easy for him

to get as much teaching as he pleased in the season? Then, too, the Duke's *kapellmeister* was getting almost past his work, and Debenham was thought so well of up at the school that he might fairly throw in the possibility of that succession among his other prospects. And what a possibility! A thousand florins per annum, a "Von" before one's name, and in one's button-hole the green ribbon of the order of the Golden Pigtail.

But the young man was to be tempted by none of these considerations. He had weighed the matter quite fully, and, having made up his mind, could by no means be brought to change it. He was twenty-four years of age, and old enough, he conceived, to judge what was best for himself. He was not disposed to wed the Academy for better or for worse. He must have a wider berth—more breathing space—some footing in that field where the race was really to the swift and the battle to the strong, and a man might give and take such blows as fell to his share. Zollenstrasse was well enough in its way. Zollenstrasse had given him his education, and he was attached to the place to a certain extent and in a certain way; but he was not going to identify himself with it for ever and aye. The idea of remaining a mere German professor all the days of his life was intolerable to him. He was weary already of the etiquette, the gossip, the æsthetic teas, and the thousand and one petty jealousies and interests of a tenth-rate German capital. He was not in the least ambitious of becoming the next grand ducal *kapellmeister*, and he did not care one kreutzer for the order of the Golden Pigtail.

So Temple Debenham's advisers threw their remonstrances away, and ended by taking offense at his obstinacy. If he would be deaf to counsel and blind to his own interests, it was at least no fault of theirs. They had done what they could to save him from a fatal error, and if, after all, he chose to ruin himself, he must do so. Even his mother (who, to do her justice, cared no more than himself for the order of the Golden Pigtail) was by no means convinced of the wisdom of her son's resolve. She reminded him that he was giving up certainty for uncertainty, substance for shadow; that it was possible to live in Germany for at least two-thirds less expense than in England; that he was already somebody in Zollenstrasse, but that he would find himself nobody in London; and a great deal more to the same effect. But all was in vain.

"It is of no use, mother," he said; "Zollenstrasse is not the place for me. I am made for something better. I may not succeed in getting that something better, but, at all events, I mean to try. So, please, don't let us talk any more about it."

Now when Temple Debenham said he meant to do a thing, he invariably did it; and the widow, knowing that she might as well acquiesce at once, opposed her son's determination no longer. So he resigned his sub-professorship and his seat in the grand ducal orchestra, packed up his music and his medals, received his double first-class certificate with all its seals, formulas, and flourishes, and bade a long farewell to the little capital which had been his home for nearly twelve years.

Thus armed, he exchanged Zollenstrasse for London, and with his mother took a modest lodging overlooking a nursery-ground, somewhere near Canonbury, at Islington. And now, in accordance with that curious law by which a novice pretty surely wins at the first throw, Temple Debenham began with a success. Before he had been three weeks in London the advertising columns of the *Times* announced that an organist was required for the parish church of St. Hildegard the Martyr. He at once entered himself for the competition, and, thanks to his fine playing and his "double first-class" certificate, might almost be said to have walked over the course.

It was his first prize in the great lottery of London life; but, as time went on, it seemed destined also to be his last. We have already seen how sanguine were his hopes, and how, in the first flush of his first success, he overrated not only his position, but his prospects. This, however, was before he had found out that the regular congregation of St. Hildegard's consisted of some fourteen persons, exclusive of the pew-opener and the clerk. Eighteen months had gone by since then, and his enthusiasm had had time to cool. The parish had brought him no connection, and his efforts to make himself known as a composer had all ended in disappointment. There, for instance, was the cantata. What pains he had lavished on that neatly-written score, and with what a beating heart he had left it at the door of a certain committee-room at Exeter Hall! But publishers are coy, and choral societies difficult, and the *opus magnus*, again and again rejected, was still unknown to fame. He had written a symphony since then, and was at work now upon an opera. His zeal, poor fellow, was yet unabated; his confidence in his own genius unimpaired. Thorough master of his subject, skilled in all the resources of his art, rich in ideas, in honest ambition, in hope, how should he not be conscious of the power that was in him? That he should feel bitter mortification when that ill-starred packet came back from the honorary secretary of this and that society was only natural. He may even have swallowed down a tear "upon occasion;" but he bore his defeats gallantly enough for the most part, and as soon as one venture miscarried was ready to put forth another. Seneca was not too heavy, nor Plautus too light for him. If the cantata was unlucky, the symphony might prove more fortunate; if the symphony missed fire, there was his pet mass in G minor; and, failing all these, an exhaustless mine of *Leider Ohne Worte*, chamber-songs, madrigals, duets, trios, quartettes, and the like. Was not his brain full of them—full to overflowing? And was not he gifted with an invincible determination to succeed—somehow?

CHAPTER II.

A DAY'S WORK.

WHEN Temple Debenham turned back and locked himself in among the gathering shadows, it was with a conscious reluctance against which his pride of industry rose in prompt rebellion. He was weary, and would not confess he was weary. He was even angry with himself for the instinctive yearning that drew him to the outer

sunlight. It was his pleasure to stay; his day's work was done; his time was his own. He could have gone away if he preferred it; he had but to lock himself out of St. Hildegard's instead of locking himself in, and turn to the river or the parks, as might seem pleasantest to him. But he chose to stay behind in the little dark church, when the school practice was over, and the school children were gone, and he could enjoy the organ for as many hours as he chose without fear of interruption. To do this was one of the privileges of his situation. It was a privilege that he valued more than his twenty-five pounds a year; for he had no piano of his own, and, of course, no organ, and to play upon some kind of instrument was about as necessary to him as food or sleep. Besides, he was always composing; and to go on day after day pouring out one's thoughts upon mere paper and ink—"piping," as it were, "to the spirit-ditties of no tone"—would have been dull work indeed. So Temple Debenham set great store by his rights and privileges, and exercised them freely.

It chanced, however, on this especial evening that he was really fagged and wanted rest. His day had been a hard one, and had begun early. He had risen, in the first place, at five, and seating himself, as he was wont to do, at his bedroom window, had worked for two hours at one of the choruses of his opera. It was a double chorus sung by monks and soldiers, with a strange old Gregorian chant cunningly interwoven among the parts, and a march in the accompaniment—a very grand affair, "full of sound and fury," winding up to a tremendous climax with rolling of drums, clashing of cymbals, and all manner of stormy orchestral effects; but produced noiselessly enough with a stumpy pencil and a few sheets of music-paper. And yet, to the young musician sitting at his open window in the clear cool morning light, now staring abstractedly over the nursery-gardens, now humming softly to himself, now scribbling a bar or two of complicated score, all those combinations, all the clashing of those cymbals and the rolling of those drums were distinctly audible. He heard them as vividly as if the orchestra and chorus were drawn up under his window; ay, and he saw the stage too—all the marching to and fro, all the waving plumes, the flashing armor, the crosses and banners, and the scenic back-ground with its deep blue sky. For the mind is gifted with ear as well as eye, and the mental tympanum of the musician is as mysteriously capable as the mental retina of the painter. The painter standing before the blank canvas sees his picture already complete—sees it by an effort, as it were, but quite distinctly, with all its light and shadow, its outline, its play of color. He does not merely fancy that he sees it. He is under no illusion. He makes use of no figure of speech. He *sees*, and sees so literally that physiologists have more than once questioned whether images thus vividly created by the imagination may not be actually reflected on the retina of the eye. So, too, the musician. Given a complicated edifice of staves built up one upon the other like the stories of a Chinese pagoda, violins or voices at the top, drums at the bottom, and all imaginable stringed and brazen instruments piled up between, he can run his eye along the whole—mass the column together in his brain—hear the crash with which

the performers lead off—mark the fitting of the melody as it lights first on one instrument and then upon another—trace the airy flights of the violins, the cooing of the clarionets, the surly comments of the basses—listen to every effect—analyze every modulation—taste every subtle discord—*hear* the whole composition, in short, and hear it with a sense as perfect and mysterious as that by which the painter sees his future picture. A strange, half-divine sort of power this! A power granted to some in only a limited degree—from some altogether withheld; but possessed by Temple Debenham in all its fullness as he sat, morning after morning, pouring forth his dumb symphonies and choruses with as true an ear to their effect as if he had the resources of a Costa at command.

Having written, then, for two hours, the young man swept his papers into a drawer, paused a moment at his mother's door to say good-by as he passed, hastily swallowed the customary cup of cold tea left for him on the parlor table, and started away for the City at a gallant pace. It was by this time nearly half past seven. The tide of clerks and omnibuses had not yet begun to flow eastward, and the shop-keepers along Islington Green were only just beginning to take down their shutters as he went by. Even the time-keeper's stool was vacant at the "Angel," and the City Road, so busy an hour or two later, was yet scarcely awake. Punctual, however, as the High-Church incumbent himself, the organist was at his post by five minutes before eight, and the early service was performed to a congregation of five. This done, he betook himself to a certain dreary corner-house in Finsbury Square, where he administered piano lessons twice a week to the infant daughters of one of his church-wardens. To Temple Debenham these lessons were sources of exquisite misery—the bitterest drop in his cup—the heaviest penalty that poverty called on him to pay. The church-warden was a meat salesman somewhere in the City. His wife weighed eighteen stone. They were excellent people; vulgar, ostentatious, good-natured, utterly distasteful to the luckless organist whose fate it was to be brought into contact with them. Their well-meant hospitality irritated him. Their English made him shudder. Their guineas weighed him down with a crushing sense of humiliation. He endured his disgust, however, in silence, and breathed no word of it to his mother, who would have suffered more than himself in knowing it.

By the time the Finsbury Square ordeal was over it was mid-day—broiling, glaring, dusty mid-day; and Temple Debenham was due at the Crystal Palace at two o'clock, where, for no pecuniary consideration whatever, but in the mere hope of becoming known as a performer, he played every other afternoon for two hours on Messrs. Stumpf and Hammerfest's new grand double-action piano-forte. Few listened to him. Nobody appreciated him. He never gained a stiver by the transaction; and, being too poor to afford the omnibus fare, wore out in three months as many pairs of boots as would have lasted him for a year at Zollenstrasse-am-Main. Still, a dogged sort of persistence being one of the strong points of this young man's character, he held to the faint chance, such as it was, and tramped the weary Sydenham road in wind, rain, dust,

and sunshine thrice a week. Drier, dustier, sunnier, longer than ever seemed the miles, duller than ever the British public, more than ever intolerable the great glass palace, this hot June day. Temple Debenham struggled, oh, how wearily! through his appointed task. He loathed Messrs. Stumpf and Hammerfest's new double-action grand. He abhorred the young lady with light eyes who said "How pretty!" after the Sonata Pathétique, and asked him for the Post Horn Galop. He hated the people in open carriages, the people on horseback, the very coster-mongers and omnibus-conductors who passed him on the road as he toiled back to town. And then, having partaken of a stale roll and a cup of muddy coffee at a dreary little shop in the Borough, he found himself once more again at St. Hildegarde. Here the school-children were assembled for their weekly drill; and so, after an hour of chanting and psalm-singing, his day's work came to a close. And a tolerably hard one it had been, too, extending over some fourteen hours, and including no interval of rest. He might well feel languid. He might well sigh for the quiet breath of the summer evening. But he put the impulse aside as if it were treasonable; and, forcing his thoughts back into the old musical groove, returned to his seat at the organ.

It was a poor little organ enough, built of stained deal, ornamented with a graduated row of plain zinc pipes, and standing about eight feet high. It looked like an overgrown set of Pandean pipes, such as might have fitted the "capacious mouth" of Sicilian Polyphemus. Small as it was, however, it did not want for tone, and had no less than fifteen stops, besides an octave and a half of pedals.

"If you please, Sir," said a shrill voice from the back, "am I to begin to blow?"

Whereupon Temple Debenham took a tumbled roll of manuscript from his pocket; swooped down upon the whole fifteen stops at once; said, "Yes, blow away, Timothy!" and began.

It was his chorus—his chorus of monks and soldiers, with the march accompaniment, which he had been at work upon in the morning. Well might he desire Timothy to "blow away," and well might Timothy—a tiny fellow in canary-colored shorts—fling himself upon the bellows like a charity boy possessed. The whole power of the organ was on, and Temple Debenham, thundering away with his trumpet stops and diapacons, gave that luckless blower more than enough to do. Higher and higher rose the defiance of the soldiers, deeper and deeper rolled the warning antistrophe of the monks, and still the exertions of the small boy at the back kept pace with the inspiration of the player. At length, when he had blown himself almost off his legs and utterly out of breath, the performance came to an end. The wind went out with a gasp. The blower dropped upon his bench exhausted. The composer pulled out a pencil, and scrawled notes on the margin of his manuscript. It was the lull following the tempest; and in the midst of it, startling the echoes after quite another fashion, came a tremendous thumping and rattling at the church door. Temple Debenham bit his lips, settled himself in his seat, and went on penciling.

"Please, Sir," said Timothy, peeping cautious-

ly round the corner, "there's somebody at the door."

"Somebody is welcome to stay there. Blow again, my man."

So Timothy went back to his blowing, and Debenham to his chorus, and the applicant outside remained unanswered. No sooner, however, was the organ again silent than the knocking began more vigorously than ever. Timothy ventured once more to the rescue.

"Please, Sir," he said, "sha'n't I go?"

"No."

"But—I think it's Mr. Blyth, Sir."

"Who gave you leave to think at all?"

"Please, Sir, I—I don't know," stammered Timothy, abashed.

"Your business here is to blow—not to think," continued the organist, with severity. "Be so good, Timothy, as to remember that fact for the future."

Whereupon the small boy slunk away, profoundly depressed, and Temple Debenham, having jotted down another bar or two, rose very leisurely, and went toward the door. The "cannoneer without" had, in the mean while, continued to knock in the most cheerful and untiring manner, delivering his blows in volleys, and showering them down upon the stout old panels with the greatest precision and brilliancy. He was in the midst of a rattling fantasia when the door suddenly opened and brought his operations to a close.

CHAPTER III.

A PAIR OF FRIENDS.

THE door fell back, and the two who there found themselves face to face shook hands over the threshold. They were about the same age. They were as nearly as possible about the same height. And yet it would have been difficult in the course of a long morning's walk to find two young men who in every other particular, whether of mind or person, were more curiously dissimilar than Temple Debenham and Archibald Blyth. They were familiar acquaintances. They called themselves friends. But they had scarcely a taste, scarcely a topic in common. They must, one would fancy, have been drawn to each other by some law entirely the reverse of that to which chemists give the name of elective affinity.

The one was essentially an artist; contemplative, reserved, indifferent for the most part to those things by which the passions and prejudices of the majority are chiefly swayed, and, like all who dwell in a world of their own creation, somewhat unsympathetic in his relations with his fellow-men. The other, on the contrary, was a "City man" born and bred; interested in business matters and business gossip, active, light-hearted, facile, easily pleased, easily persuaded, and given to the lavish exercise of a wit which was, in truth, of the smallest calibre. To Temple Debenham, on the contrary, were given an iron will, a patent strength of purpose, and a profound energy of character which wore too often the outward aspect of sullenness or scorn. Nor did the contrast end here. It went beyond diversity of disposition, of pursuits, of mental culture, and extended to mere personal appear-

ance. They were to the full as unlike each other in style and feature as in all the rest.

The portrait of Archibald Blyth may be sketched in a dozen words. He was fair and boyish-looking; had frank, bright eyes, rather blue than gray; a dimple in his chin; and the most good-natured smile in the world. He cultivated his whiskers after the latest stock-exchange fashion. He delighted in a white hat and a blue cravat. And he had a weakness for jewelry. He dressed, in short, with that "City" smartness which, however difficult to define, is distinctly characteristic of the class to which it belongs. Of that class the organist's friend might fairly be taken as a type. One may see dozens of Archibald Blyths more or less jeweled, white-hatted, and blue-cravatted, sitting to and fro about Mark Lane, Leadenhall Street, and Cheapside, any sunshiny morning between March and October.

Adequately to transfer to paper the outward man of Temple Debenham is a less easy matter; and this chiefly, perhaps, because in him the outward was for the most part but an indication of the inward. As the jagged outlines of a mountain summit betray the secret of its formation, so in his face was every line, in some sense, a graven hieroglyphic, and in his general bearing each wanted gesture of special signification. He was not handsome. He was not even what is called "striking looking" at first sight, because the expression of power that would have made him so to a merely casual observer was controlled, almost concealed, by habitual reserve. His brow was broad rather than lofty; prominent and overhanging above the eyes, as was the brow of Handel, of Beethoven, of most famous musicians. His eyes were dark, deep-set, luminous; seeming, however, to lose their light at times, as if it were turned inward—and then blazing out again, like a beacon on the sea. The chin and jaw were square cut, strong, yet delicate; the lips, on the other hand, were thin, flexible, somewhat compressed, as if to keep down their involuntary play of expression; and, though capable of lighting up into a smile singularly grave and sweet, were not wholly free from a lurking suspicion of sarcasm about the corners. He was tall, nearly six feet in height; sparely yet strongly built; lengthy of limb; light and swift of step; with something resolute and eager-looking in the very stoop of his head and shoulders—for it was a stoop that told neither of indolence nor weakness, but of *onwardness*, as if life were literally a race, and he were forever pressing forward. He wore his hair long, after the fashion of German students in general; and upon his upper lip a heavy, drooping, brown mustache, which he was wont to gnaw furiously when he was playing. And his hands were long, slender, supple, with nerves and muscles of steel beneath their delicate surface; and his complexion was pale; and his voice was grave and clear; and when all these things are said, we have no portrait of the man after all; but only a *catalogue raisonné* of his inches, color, and so forth; the which conveys no more idea of his personality than a map conveys of the scenery of Switzerland. Here, we say, is a lake—there a valley—between these mountains a pass. The mountains stand so many thousand feet high. The pass is so many thousand feet above the level of the sea. "Words

—words—words!" What have these measurements to tell us of the glory of the everlasting peaks, of the scented gloom of the pine forest, of the rose-flush on the snow-field, of the gentian shivering on the brink of the glacier? The poorest sketch ever committed to paper were in this case more effectual than the best map that money could purchase, as the commonest photograph of Temple Debenham would here be worth more than a volume of elaborate description. Such as it is, however, the portrait must stand—in default of a better.

And these were the two who shook hands that summer evening over the threshold of St. Hildegarde the Martyr.

"Sorry to interrupt you," said Debenham, grimly.

The new-comer flung away the end of his cigar, and stepped in without waiting for an invitation.

"My dear fellow," he said, "don't mention it. I am charmed to exchange any occupation, however instructive or entertaining, for your society."

The organist shrugged his shoulders and relocked the door.

"Go on," he said; "you know the way. What a diabolical *vacarme* you have been making!"

"You recognized the 'Huntsmen's Chorus?'"

"Not I."

"Then, Orestes, the delicate susceptibilities of thy Pylades are wounded. Methought that soul-stirring strain, albeit performed with no more capable instrument than the prosaic walking-stick of daily life, would have waked a familiar echo to thine ear."

"I thought you would have battered the door in," replied Debenham.

"And I—horrible suspicion!—I feared my friend was stricken with deafness."

Temple Debenham, who had by this time resumed his place at the organ, muttered some not very intelligible apology, and suggested that his visitor should be seated.

"What if I take one of those not too luxurious *prie-dieu* chairs—will it be sacrilege, O my Orestes?"

"If you could be rational for only five minutes, Archie, I should be so much obliged to you."

The new-comer took out his watch.

"It wants precisely four minutes to eight," he said, gravely. "I promise to be unexceptionally rational till one minute past the hour. Accept the effort, my dear fellow, as a tribute to friendship."

The organist struck an impatient chord or two.

"Where do you come from?" he asked, presently. "What have you been doing all day?"

"Ask me, rather, why I am here now."

"I should hardly be so uncivil."

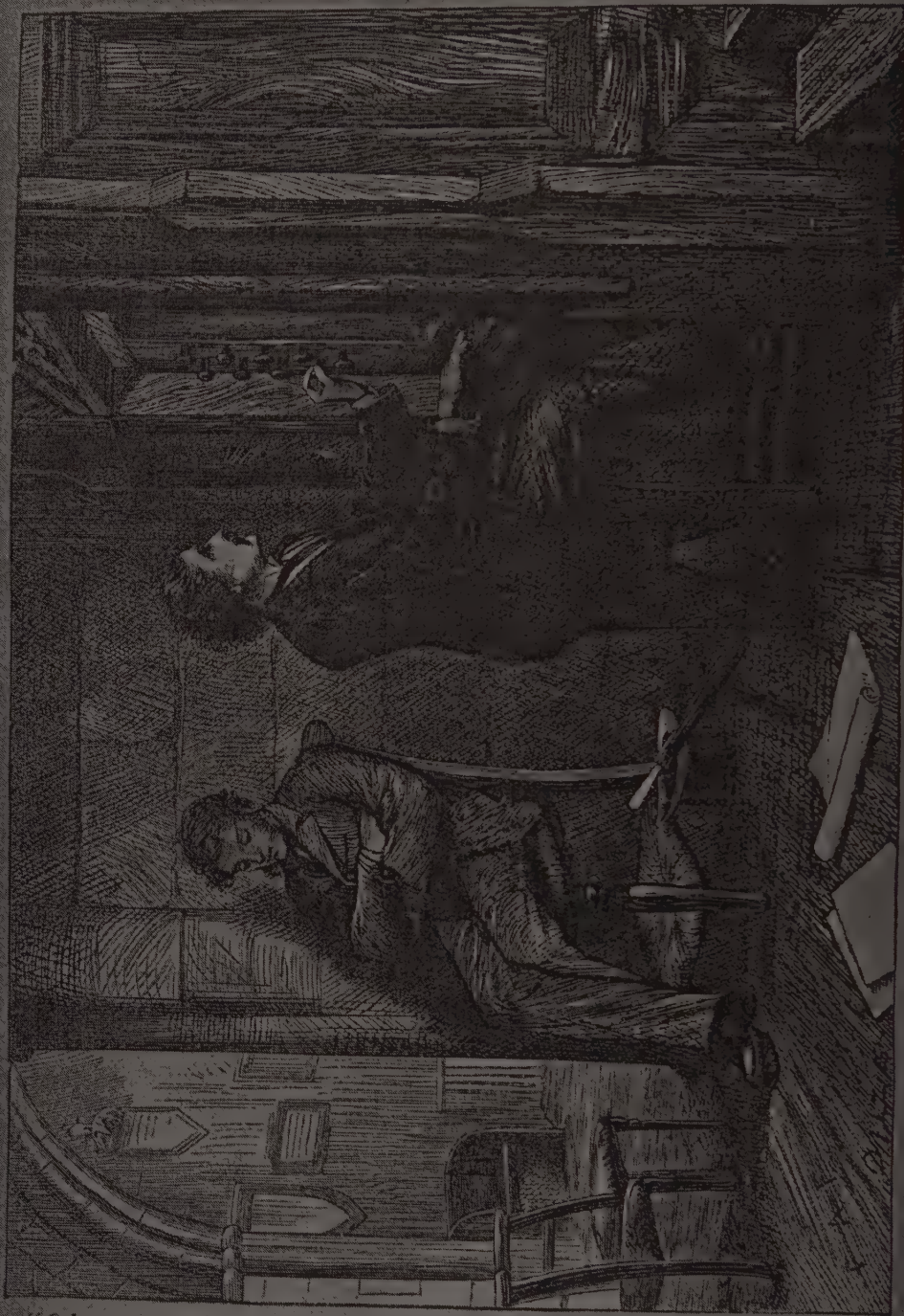
"Is it possible?"

"Besides, I can guess. You have nothing better to do."

"Not a bit of it. I have a good deal that is better to do."

"Then why—?"

"Exactly so. Why—not being born for the express purpose of blushing unseen—should I waste my sweetness, and so forth? Because I have been over to the Regent's Park this afternoon, and seen the Hardwicks."



"WITH THIS PROTEST TEMPLE DEBENHAM TURNED AGAIN TO HIS ORGAN," ETC.

"*Qu'est ce que cela me fait?* The Hardwicks are nothing to me."

"Pardon me. The Hardwicks, my Orestes, are something to you. Josiah Hardwicke is an undoubted something to you. Does not the whole parish, such as it is, belong to him?"

"What of that? I am not a part of the parish."

"You belong to it—you, and the parson, the clerk, the beadle, and the charity children. You are his loyal subjects, every one of you."

There, don't look fierce. I am not asking you to do him homage. I am only reminding you that he is the father of his people, and that it's better worth your while to have him for a friend than an enemy."

"I am not aware," said Debenham, haughtily, "that Mr. Hardwicke is called upon to be either my friend or my enemy."

Archibald Blyth uttered a subdued groan, and for a few moments there was silence. Then, looking down and fidgeting with his cane, he said:

"Now, Debenham, look here! Let us talk sense. Your name turned up to-day at Strathellan House—and—and the opportunity occurring, I—I— By Jove, I'm afraid to tell you."

"Afraid?"

"Well, you're so impracticable, you know. But I thought it might pave the way to something better, and—and money is money—"

The organist faced suddenly round.

"Confound you, Archie," he said, almost angrily, "what folly have you been committing in my name? Out with it!"

"Well, Hardwicke gives one of his great parties to-morrow night, and they had engaged Thalberg to play—they always engage some musical star for their great gatherings, you know."

"Yes, yes; I have heard you say so. Go on."

"This afternoon, however, Thalberg telegraphs to say that he is detained in Paris by a command from the Tuileries, and can not keep his engagement. Pylades being present when the telegram is delivered, at once proposes Orestes. I, Pylades, undertake that you, Orestes, shall take Thalberg's place. The Hardwicke's commission me to offer you ten guineas for the evening, and—*me voici!*"

A shadow passed over Temple Debenham's face.

"How do they know that I am competent to take Thalberg's place?" he said.

"Because I told them all about you."

"Indeed! And may I ask what that was?"

"Oh, I said what a wonderful musician you were; and how you composed; and that you had taken a musical degree at that place in Germany—"

"I took nothing of the kind. The academy has no power to confer degrees. It is not a university."

"Then what is that parchment affair that you once showed me, with all the seals and flourishes?"

"Pooh!—my certificate."

"Well, it's much the same thing. I engaged, at all events, that you should play as well as Thalberg, if not better; and here I am, the bearer of their offer."

The organist looked down uneasily.

"It is a very liberal offer," he said; "but—"

"You are not going to decline it?"

Debenham hesitated.

"No," he said. "That is, I am not sure. I can not afford to decline it."

"Then why hesitate?"

"Because—well, I have played, of course, at the Grand Duke's parties; but then in Germany the social position of the artist is so different; and—and he was the Grand Duke, after all. It is not quite the same thing, Archie."

"My cousin is not a German grand duke, if that is what you mean. But he is an English merchant, and a gentleman."

"I don't doubt that Mr. Hardwicke is a gentleman," replied the organist, hastily; "but, then, in what light would he regard me? As an inferior?"

"No, no, of course not! As my friend—as an artist."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Beyond a doubt. But—but then there's Claudia."

"Who is Claudia?"

"Hardwicke's sister—mistress of his house—handsome—horribly proud—not a pleasant person, I admit. A sort of Edith Dombey, you know. Frightens a fellow out of his senses at the first glance."

"I don't think she would frighten me," said Debenham, smiling.

"Ah, you don't know her," replied Mr. Blyth, with a prolonged shake of the head. "She's a beautiful refrigerator, my Orestes. However, if you are not daunted—"

"Neither by her beauty nor her pride," said the organist. "I can not afford to be afraid of a lady."

"Then I may say that you accept?"

"Yes. At what hour?"

"Ten o'clock precisely. They have condescended to invite me this time. Shall we go together, or do you prefer to go alone?"

"I think I will go alone, if you don't mind, Archie. And now, having disposed of that matter, shall I play to you?"

"Do—always provided that you play down to my level. I can't stand Bach."

"The *Gloria* from Mozart's 'Twelfth Mass,' then?"

"I had rather hear the prayer from 'Masaniello.'"

"As Christopher Sly, when he might have quaffed sack, called for 'a pot o' the smallest ale.' Oh, Archie, Archie, are you not ashamed of your taste?"

With this protest Temple Debenham turned again to his organ, and, having played the prayer "by desire," glided thence into a stream of extemporaneous composition, down which, unconscious of the deepening twilight, he suffered his fancy to float as it listed—a stream that followed every capricious twist and turn of his wandering thoughts; now sparkling in sunshine—now darkling in shadow—now lingering tenderly about some little phrase of melody, sweet and wild as water-side blossoms; now breaking away, and eddying on from key to key in a tumult of strange modulations; now falling into a sudden trance of calm, tender and lulling as though the breath of the lotus were being wafted upon the face of the waters; and at last, after many a hindrance and many a "winding bout," flowing on to a close in one majestic strain, like a tidal river widening to the sea. Long before he came to his journey's end, however, Temple Debenham lost all remembrance of the listener for whose entertainment he was supposed to be playing, and left off at last to find the church all darkness, and Archibald Blyth as profoundly asleep as Bedreddin Hassan at the gate of Damascus.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HARDWICKES.

JOSIAH HARDWICKE, Esquire, of Strathellan House, Regent's Park, Hardwicke Hall, Kent, and the parish of St. Hildegard the Martyr, situate within the liberties of the city of London, in the County of Middlesex, was a man of very considerable wealth, and much respected in the commercial world. He was a merchant, and he came of a family of merchants, many of w^h

had been city magnates in their day—none, by-the-way, more notable than his uncle, the well-known Sir Thomas Hardwicke, Knight, forty-four years alderman, and, like Dick Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London. For himself, however, Mr. Hardwicke placed but slight value on civic dignities. He had, indeed, declined them so often that his fellow-citizens had at length grown weary of pressing them upon him. Neither the robe of the Common Councilman, nor the Aldermanic gown, nor the golden collar of the Mayor, possessed any kind of attraction for him. Being elected Sheriff, he paid the fine sooner than accept the office. He objected even to be chairman of a board, or to preside at a public dinner. It was, in short, his peculiarity—perhaps his pride—lightly to esteem those things which most City men covet. To know that his signature was “good” on any Exchange in Europe, that his agents were to be found in all great commercial ports, and his ships on every ocean highway, was all the distinction he professed to value.

Mr. Hardwicke was one of those portly, suave, middle-aged, and somewhat pompous bachelors, of whom one is ready to predict at first sight that they will remain bachelors to the end of the chapter. His features were good, his complexion florid, his hair iron-gray, curling, and abundant. Pardonably vain of a handsome foot and hand, he was scrupulous in the matter of boots and gloves; and, indeed, generally solicitous respecting the adornment of his outward man.

With regard to what Anthony à Wood would have styled “his intellectuals,” Mr. Hardwicke was a man of good average education, and more than average capacity. He had gone to school at Harrow, and staid there longer than most lads destined for the City. He had traveled. He spoke French with fluency and refinement; and he had some taste for art—a taste sound enough as far as it went, but neither sufficiently deep nor sufficiently cultivated to lead him beyond the precincts of the French Salon or the English Academy. Of the merits of a Giotto, a Perugino, a John Bellini, he had no perception whatever. He tried to relish Raffaele, but entertained a secret preference for Carlo Dolce; and he esteemed Meissonier above every other painter, living or dead. Still, he did care for pictures, and he not only cared for them, but bought them; and as his taste was essentially modern, and as the pictures he bought were really good, it followed that Mr. Hardwicke's money went for the encouragement of living art, and the support of the living painter, and so did more positive service than if he had been imbued with the strictest classicism from his youth upward.

A man's house, however, must be to some extent a reflection of himself. Granted that the upholsterer and decorator supply both taste and furniture, enough must always remain to indicate something of the culture and proclivities of the possessor. By means of the pictures on his walls, and the books, or absence of books, on his table—by his dogs, his birds, his flowers—nay, even by his walking-stick and umbrella, one may draw many a shrewd inference, and supply many a *lacuna*. In like manner, had a practiced observer been set down within the precincts of Strathellan House, he would have found on every side indications, slight but certain, on which to

found his estimate of the master of the establishment. It was a very big house to begin with—one of the biggest and finest houses in the Regent's Park, furnished throughout with the biggest and finest furniture. It had a front like a Grecian temple; a Gothic lodge; a handsome carriage drive; huge conservatories; a built-out ball-room forty feet in length; and gardens planned in the Italian style, sloping down to the ornamental water at the back. It was, in short, just such a house as it seems impossible to describe without falling into the style of one of Messrs. Christie and Manson's advertisements. There was the entrance-hall, like the hall of a club-house, with busts of the twelve Cæsans standing on Scagliola pillars round the walls. There was the spacious staircase carpeted with the richest and softest velvet pile carpeting, up which Mr. Hardwicke's guests might have walked six abreast. There was the suite of reception-rooms, three in number—the yellow damask room, the blue satin room, and the crimson velvet room—all paneled with enormous looking-glasses, lit by chandeliers like pendent fountains, and crowded with gilded furniture, pictures in heavy Italian frames, tables of Florentine mosaic, cabinets in buhl and marqueterie, ormolu clocks, and expensive trifles from all quarters of the globe. Here was nothing antique—nothing rare, save for its costliness. Here were no old masters, no priceless pieces of majolica, no Cellini caskets, no enamels, no intagli, no Etruscan tazze, or Pompeian relics; but in their place great vases of the finest modern Sèvres, paintings by Frith, Maclise, Stanfield, Meissonier, and David Roberts, bronzes by Barbedienne, Chinese ivory carvings, and wonderful clock-work toys from Geneva. The malachite table in the boudoir came from the International Exhibition of 1851; the marble group in the alcove at the end of the third drawing-room was by Marochetti; the Gobelin tapestries were among the latest products of the Imperial looms. Money, in short, was there omnipresent—money in abundance; and even taste. But not taste of the highest order. Not that highly trained taste which seems to “run” in certain classes of society, like handsome hands or fine complexions. Mr. Hardwicke, however, had no claim to this kind of hereditary culture. He sprang from no aristocratic stock. His childhood had not been spent in the midst of old family Holbeins and Vandycks, or under the shade of ancestral oaks. Born within hearing of Bowbells, brought up to regard the City as his destiny, transferred from Harrow to the counting-house at nineteen years of age, and living ever since in an atmosphere of trade, it was, on the whole, extremely creditable to him that he should know and care as much as he did about the graceful things of life. In all these matters, however, Miss Hardwicke's taste and influence should be taken into account—and Miss Hardwicke's influence was paramount in Mr. Hardwicke's house.

She was his youngest and only surviving sister—a handsome, haughty, stately woman, who ruled the merchant's household after a queen-like fashion, and had so ruled it since the day when she first came home from the Continental boarding-school at which her education had been finished. Rich by the inheritance of two separate fortunes, the one coming to her under her mother's marriage settlement, the other under

the will of her uncle, the ex-lord mayor and alderman—proud with a pride that was in nowise concerned with either her wealth or her beauty, unless in the scorning of all wealth amassed in trade, and of all beauty that had not its source in noble blood—ambitious in her secret heart of hearts, passionately ambitious of rank, of social distinction, of power in any shape—cold in manner—colder still in speech—a silent hostess, and an indifferent guest, Claudia Hardwicke enjoyed the honor of being very cordially disliked by the bulk of her brother's acquaintances. Toward City men, their wives, daughters, entertainments, conversation, society, and all therewith connected, she cherished a profound distaste; and this distaste she was at no pains to conceal. She would talk French and German across Mrs. Alderman Butterworth throughout a long City dinner, bestowing no more notice upon that superb matron than if she were a lay figure in velvet and diamonds. At her own receptions she would studiously ignore the musical acquirements of the Jenkinson girls (though they sang really well, and had seventy thousand pounds apiece), and made a point of engaging what Archibald Blyth called a "musical star" for the evening. At certain state parties, where the great City dames vied with each other in splendor, she would appear in the simplest toilette that good taste and a first-class dress-maker could devise, without an ornament of any description. And because she did these and a thousand other things of the same kind, and because, being a woman, and a clever one, she knew precisely how and where to plant every *banderilla* that a scornful wit could suggest, Miss Hardwicke counted her foes by the score, and rejoiced in her unpopularity.

But with all her magnificent scorn of men and things, Miss Hardwicke was mortal and had her failings. There was something great about her pride, but there was also something small. Truth to tell, she "dearly loved a lord." Title, precedence, a coronet on her carriage panels, a footing in the *grande monde*—these were the glories for which she sighed. She held them to be not shadows, but substantial things; and she was destined, perhaps, to find out some day that they were but shadows after all.

CHAPTER V.

THE PARTY AT STRATHELLAN HOUSE.

WRAPPED in some sort of loose German overcoat adorned in the orthodox German-student fashion, with braid and buttons in abundance, Temple Debenham made his way up the avenue and into the hall of Strathellan House. The night outside was intensely dark; the hall a blaze of light; so that he was for a moment almost dazzled to find himself in the presence of the twelve Cæsars and Mr. Hardwicke's footmen. He came on foot, and the dust on his boots betrayed him. He carried a roll of music in his hand. And he waited in the hall to put on his white gloves before going up stairs. The twelve Cæsars and the twin giants in livery looked on contemptuously. They had seen the sort of thing before, and they knew what it meant.

"Come to play the piano," whispered Thomas to John.

"Looks poor enough too," responded John. "But then there's poor and rich, the same as in every thing else. The last we had came in his private brougham, like a gentleman."

And then a carriage full of ladies drove up, and the organist went up stairs and presented himself at the door of the first drawing-room, unannounced.

It was a very splendid room, gorgeously furnished, but almost empty. A little group of gentlemen about the fire-place, and a young lady turning over a volume of engravings at a side-table, were its only occupants. There was a sound of many voices in the reception-rooms beyond, but the young man did not like to venture farther. The damsel at the side-table looked up for a moment; but the gentlemen at the fire-place, eager in discussion, seemed not even to observe that another guest was present. So Temple Debenham, after lingering for a few minutes near the door, wandered over to the table, and, keeping as far as possible from the young lady already in possession, took refuge also in a book.

Because he had not yet been received, he would not take a seat; but, still holding his roll of music in one hand, stooped over the volume, chafing inwardly. He had seen the ladies who arrived after him ushered into a ground-floor room where tea and coffee were served. Why had he not been shown there also? Why, at least, had neither of the big footmen conducted him up stairs, and announced his name at the door? Did they know who he was? Had they been instructed beforehand to treat him with indignity? He told himself if it were so—if he could be sure it were so—he would straightway walk down stairs, and never enter the house again.

At this moment appeared one of the twin giants at the drawing-room door, vociferating with all the power of his lungs the names of "Mrs. Blower, Miss Blower, Miss Juliana Blower, Miss Bianca Blower;" and in sailed the four ladies whom the organist had encountered in the hall. At almost the same moment Mr. Hardwicke came forward from the adjoining room to receive them. He shook hands with Mrs. Blower; he bowed to each of Mrs. Blower's daughters; he inquired solicitously after the health of various absent Blowers. Then he gave his arm to Mrs. Blower, and led her and hers into those more distant rooms where the company seemed mostly to have congregated.

The cloud on Debenham's brow deepened. He fancied that Mr. Hardwicke's eye had lighted on him as he turned away; and to be seen and not welcomed was even worse than to be neither seen nor welcomed.

"If he saw me at all," thought he, "he must have known me; and if he knew me, he is bound to welcome me to his house." And then he remembered having asked Archie Blyth how he should be treated if he came, and Archie had protested that he would be received and regarded as a guest—a guest *pur et simple*. But surely he had been a fool to take Archie's word in the matter. He might have known how it would be. He might have known that, having consented to come to this man's house for money—

for ten miserable guineas—he had, as it were, sold himself for the time being, and become, in a certain sense, the man's inferior.

"He has hired me," he muttered, as he bent still lower over the album with which he was pretending to be occupied. "I am his servant to-night, and he treats me as his servant."

And reflecting thus, Temple Debenham contrived so to aggravate himself that he was on the point of shutting up the book and shaking the dust of Mr. Hardwicke's house from off his feet, when a hand was suddenly laid upon his shoulder, and a familiar voice said close to his ear:

"Well, old fellow, do you think it like?"

"Like!" he echoed. "Do I think what like?"

"Why, that, to be sure."

And Archibald Blyth, scented, curled, gloved, and gorgeously with jewelry, laid his finger on a certain *carte de visite* inserted in the page over which his friend happened to be bending.

"Is it meant for you?" asked Debenham, who, intently as he had seemed to be looking, had not seen a photograph in the book till this moment.

"Most people think it a capital likeness. It's one of Silvy's."

"And this?"

"Horatio Slawkins, son of Sir Obadiah Slawkins, who was Lord Mayor a few years ago, and got knighted—I've no notion why. The whole tribe of Slawkins will be here to-night, I suppose. Are the other rooms pretty full?"

"I do not know," replied Debenham. "I have not been into them."

"You've seen my cousins?"

"Mr. Hardwicke came through just now, to receive some ladies. I should not know Miss Hardwicke, if I were to see her."

"Here's her portrait—not half handsome enough, of course; but like her."

"Not handsome at all, to my mind," said the organist, who was in no mood just then to admire anything.

"Ah! you won't say that when you see the original. Her features are perfect, and she has the air of a queen."

"Of a tragedy queen, I should say."

"No, there's no pretense about her; it's all pride, and the pride is real enough. She has about as much heart, you know, as a cricket-ball."

The guests by this time were arriving rapidly, passing for the most part direct into the farther drawing-rooms, and thence, by degrees, overflowing back again into the first. Of these the majority were merchants, stock-brokers, aldermen, and so forth, with their wives and families; with here and there a West End banker, or an aristocratic railway director with a handle to his name.

Archibald Blyth, not a little proud of his wealthy kinsfolk, and the splendors of Strathellan House, staid by his friend, pointing out most of the guests by name, bowing to some, being spoken to by others, and stealing a side-glance now and then at the musician's face to measure the extent of his admiration.

"That's old Lady Tuke," he whispered, eagerly, "wife of Sir Sloman Tuke, the member for Jogglebury; and that little dark man now talking to her is Abrahams—Japhet Abrahams,

you know, of the firm of Abrahams and Gabriel—a man worth his two millions and a half, if he's worth a penny. The couple now coming in are Sheriff Biddles and his wife. He will be the next Lord Mayor; she was the widow of Alderman Sharples. Immensely rich—fine woman—knows how to dress. Don't see such diamonds every day, do we, my Orestes? Ah, here comes Mr. Choake—your parson, old fellow. Why don't you bow to him?"

"He is the vicar of St. Hildegarde's—I am only the organist," replied Debenham, drawing himself to his full height. "Let him bow to me, if he is so disposed."

But the Reverend Tobias Choake—a tall, pallid, lank-haired young man, who fasted on Fridays and saints' days, advocated auricular confession, and was suspected of wearing a hair-shirt under his patent Eureka—passed on with an air of the deepest abstraction, recognizing no one.

"There goes a fellow who would give any thing if he might be allowed to shave a little round place on the top of his head," said Archie, laughing. "By Jove! here's Washington Flack. Wonderful man!—Yankee—writes for the *Transatlantic Exterminator*—goes everywhere—knows every thing about every body. Shall I introduce you?"

Debenham, however, had no wish to become acquainted with the man who knew every thing about every body; and that illustrious American having recognized Archibald Blyth by a passing salutation, was swept on by the stream.

An hour—more than an hour—had now gone by, and Temple Debenham had not yet penetrated beyond the outer room. But the outer room was by this time almost as full as the others, and quite as noisy. The guests seemed, for the most part, to be acquainted, and talked familiarly, as City people talk whose interests, occupations, and topics are alike. The young man stood apart, scanning somewhat curiously, perhaps also somewhat critically, this gallery of *bourgeois* heads. Scraps of a hundred conversations buzzed about his ears—greetings, gossip, the news of the day, the price of shares, the bank rate of discount, the Greek loan, the state of the money market, the stoppage of the Anglo-Abyssinian Bank, the rumored failure of Clint and Clutterbuck, the aspect of American politics, the prospects of the cotton trade. It was money, money, money; on all sides, money; on every lip the same song; in every mind the one prevailing idea.

"Come, Debenham," said his friend, secretly disappointed by the indifference with which the musician was looking on, "did you ever see any thing like this down at that place in Germany?"

"Like *this*?" repeated Debenham, with a curious emphasis on the pronoun.

"Such diamonds, you know—such dresses—such wealth? Why, there must be over three hundred people here already, and I don't suppose there are fifty out of the number who are not rich—very rich indeed."

"I understand. Money is here what rank was at Zollenstrasse. A case of purse *versus* pedigree—the 'gowd's' the 'man,' and his banker's book is his patent of nobility. *À la bonne heure! Autre temps, autre mœurs.*"

"I'd sooner be a rich English merchant than

a beggarly German duke, any day," retorted the City man, half angrily.

At this moment a voice, almost at Debenham's shoulder, said, not loudly, but with singular distinctness:

"It is time we had some music. Does any one know where this paragon of Archie's is to be found?"

He turned, and found himself face to face with Mr. Hardwicke and a lady.



CHAPTER VI.

MISS HARDWICKE.

DEBENHAM did not need to be told that the lady was Miss Hardwicke. He should have recognized her from Archie's description, if even he had not seen her photograph. The photograph, indeed, did her no kind of justice; but the description, if it could be called a description, was correct enough. Her features were "perfect," and she had "the air of a queen." She was not, however, as he had once said, like Edith Dombey—the flashing-eyed, raven-haired, theatrical Edith Dombey of the illustrations we all know so well. Not in the least. Her beauty was of a far loftier and rarer order—classic, stately, serene. Not classic according to that current acceptance of the phrase, which limits the classicism of beauty to the Greek ideal, and takes for its universal standard some such familiar model as the Clytie of the Townley marbles; but classic after the Roman type—a type essentially real; majestic rather than alluring; intellectual rather than sensuous; expressive in the highest degree of purpose, of gravity, of command; a type, in short, which, however influenced by Greek taste and modified by Greek artists, retained from first to last, in its decadence as in its prime, the stately and impressive characteristics of Etruscan origin.

Essentially classical, then, but essentially of the Roman school, was the beauty of Claudia Hardwicke. Turned suddenly to stone by the

wand of a malicious enchanter, she would have passed for a noble specimen of the art of the Augustan period. The shape and pose of her head, the somewhat massive throat, the stately sweep of the shoulders, the full and faultless modeling of the ample bust, would have borne to be transferred direct to marble, nor have needed any refining touches from the chisel of the sculptor. As for her hand and arm, they were simply perfect. Giulia Grisi in the first splendor of her youth had not a more perfect arm. Those who had lived long enough to compare the impressions of some thirty and odd years ago with the impressions of to-day, averred that Miss Hardwicke's arm was the more beautiful of the two. Like Grisi's, it was white, rounded, dimpled at the elbow, dimpled at the wrist, almost infantile in the exquisite softness of the curves, yet suggestive of none of the feebleness of infancy—suggestive, on the contrary, of more than ordinary womanly strength. Like Grisi's, too, it was somewhat fuller than is, perhaps, prescribed by the strict canons of art. Here, however, the resemblance ceased. Miss Hardwicke's hand was not in the least like the hand of the great prima donna. It was not a small hand; neither was it a large hand; but it was as large a hand as might pertain to a finely proportioned woman. White was it, but not too white; soft, but not too soft; pleasant to hold; firm to clasp; with just an indication of dimples across the knuckles in repose, and a blush of rose-pink on the palm. And the fingers of this charming hand were not taper—for your taper finger, we take it, deserves only to be regarded as an elegant deformity, and may be cast into the same scale with small waists and arched eyebrows, and all such doubtful perfections—but they were rounded at the tips and curved upward against the nails, which is far more beautiful. It was the sort of hand that looks best unadorned, and is almost disfigured by rings. It was the sort of hand that painters and sculptors love. Michael Angelo would have modeled it again and again—would have filled pages of one of his wonderful note-books with sketches of it in every position and from every point of view. To say this, however, is to sum up the foregoing description in a single line. We all know what kind of hand it was that Michael Angelo loved. He would as soon have fashioned a Cleopatra or a Zenobia with a wasp-like waist as with tiny hands or taper fingers. So much, then, for Miss Hardwicke's statuesque beauty of form. Justly to describe the beauty of her face is more difficult; and here again recourse must be had to that Roman type already made use of. Her features, "perfect" as they were, had nothing in common with those of the Niobe or the Venus of Milo; still less with those of the Clytie of the Townley marbles. But she did strikingly resemble one of the finest specimens of Roman art in the gallery of the Louvre—namely, the statue of that Julia, known as Julia Domna, who was the wife of Septimius Severus. A more majestic portrait was never shaped in marble. Beautiful with an imperial kind of beauty befitting the wife and mother of emperors, she stands with her head bent slightly forward, as in the act of graciously listening. With one hand she seems to have just drawn aside her veil; the other hand and all the rest

of the figure are closely draped. She is tall—taller than the generality of tall women. Her brow is neither low nor lofty; but it is lofty enough to be intellectual, and it perfects the oval of her face. The nose, small, refined, and delicately cut, just departs sufficiently from the severe line of the Greek ideal to belong to the Roman type. The eyes are long and serious. The mouth, exquisitely modeled, but sharper in its curves than the Greek, is indicative both of sweetness and firmness; chiefly, however, of firmness. The chin, though small, is prominent, and indented with a tiny cleft. An indescribable air of dignity, of modesty, of serenity, of reserve, is expressed in all the contours of this admirable piece of art; in the turn of the head; in the position of the hands; in the arrangement of the hair; in the foot half withdrawn; in every clinging fold of the voluminous drapery. Above all, it is patrician through and through. The very marble is, as it were, informed with the subtlest element of aristocracy.

And to this statue—this statue of a Roman empress, who reigned, sinned, died, some sixteen centuries and more ago—Miss Hardwicke bore so singular a resemblance that any written description of the one must unavoidably tally with any written description of the other. The two profiles were identical. The features of both seemed to have been cast in the same mould. There must, of course, have been minor points of divergence, and could the lady and the statue have been placed side by side, those points of divergence would probably have come into marked relief; but, taken apart, they were so slight as to escape detection. Enough that the likeness was true, marked, and unmistakable—so marked, so unmistakable, that Miss Hardwicke's bust (done by a Florentine sculptor, and enthroned in a niche hung with ruby velvet curtains at the upper end of the dining-room at Strathellan House) might well have been taken for a copy of the head and bust of the Julia Domna of the Louvre. The same royal look was there, and even more than the same pride. Not, however, the same sweetness. In Miss Hardwicke, the gracious air of the marble empress was altogether wanting. That which showed as dignity in the one became hauteur in the other; reserve hardened into scorn; serenity into icy coldness. She moved, spoke, smiled, as if no man born of woman were worthy to touch so much as the hem of her garment. She might have sprung from a line of empresses, or, like Caesar, have claimed descent from a goddess, so imperial was her beauty and her bearing.

And yet the Hardwicks had not one drop of blue blood in their veins. They had been merchants and tradesmen, and had intermarried with the sons and daughters of merchants and tradesmen for four generations. Beyond that point all was chaos. Miss Hardwicke knew that her grandfather was a saddler, that he had been a member of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, and that he succeeded his father, Amos Hardwicke, in the saddlery business. But who the said Amos Hardwicke had married, whence his parents came, and where he was buried, were facts respecting which not even a tradition remained in the family. With this ancestor the Hardwicke pedigree came to an

abrupt conclusion; and even he, Amos Hardwicke, was but a name—a mere phantom hovering dimly about the confines of the eighteenth century, with chaos behind him. Where nothing is known, however, any thing is possible—at all events in the way of genealogy—and the haughty Claudia, who would have given all her fortune for a noble name, may have descended from Danish Vikings, or have owed her dower of supreme beauty to Roman ancestors, when the Romans ruled in Britain. But these were mere chaotic possibilities, only to be dreamed of now and then “twixt sleep and wake:”—to be dreamed of, and trampled upon, and cast scornfully back into that same chaos whence they came.

And this was the Claudia Hardwicke with whom Temple Debenham, turning at the sound of her voice, found himself quite suddenly face to face.

She wore a dress of some delicate shade of gray velvet; soft, and lustrous, and pearly, like the inside of a shell, and trimmed with massive old Veronese lace about the sleeves and bosom. A single diamond star flashed in the folds of her hair. It was brown hair—rich, crisp brown hair, with a dash of gold upon it. In her hand she held a gorgeous Oriental fan of crimson feathers. That diamond star was her only ornament, that fan her only point of color. It was a dress that would have been infinitely trying to any woman of doubtful complexion; but to Claudia Hardwicke no color was trying. She could wear literally what she pleased; and this because she was herself almost colorless—like marble with the warmth of life in it. All this, and infinitely more than all this, flashed upon Debenham at a glance. The pale, proud beauty, the classic grace, the scarcely concealed air of weariness and scorn, the half contemptuous tone—he observed and noted all.

“It is quite time we had some music. Does any one know where this paragon of Archie's is to be found?”

These, spoken in that low ringing voice which he then heard for the first time, were the words that caused him to turn and look at her; and in the words themselves, as well as in the tone, there was something that displeased him.

“Here is Archie,” said Mr. Hardwicke, graciously shaking hands with his cousin. “And Mr. Debenham, whom I had the pleasure of meeting before.”

The organist bowed.

“My sister was just inquiring for you, Mr. Debenham,” continued the merchant, with his blandest manner. “Our friends would no doubt be gratified to hear some music. You will find a piano in the middle room.”

“We have heard much of Mr. Debenham's talent,” added the lady.

But the words were pronounced with just that degree of indifference that robs a civil speech of its civility.

The organist bowed again—this time so profoundly that only a superficial observer could have mistaken such exaggerated deference for the deference of humility.

“To be overestimated,” he said, “is a misfortune. Mr. Blyth's opinion must, I fear, be taken rather as the measure of his regard than of my merit.”

Slowly and haughtily Miss Hardwicke lifted her eyes and surveyed this hired musician who presumed to let it be seen that he appraised her speech at its value. As slowly, as haughtily, he gave back the look. No word was uttered, but the dialogue was unmistakable. The one said, "I have condescended to patronize you; it is your place to accept the patronage unquestioningly." The other replied, "I recognize in you no right of patronage, and I decline to accept it."

This episode occupied but a moment. Miss Hardwicke just looked at him, froze into unconsciousness, and passed on. Mr. Hardwicke, already in the midst of another conversation, observed nothing. But Archie Blyth saw it all, and became supremely uncomfortable.

"Come and play, Debenham," he said, nervously. "That is better than talking about it."

Then, as they made their way to the middle room, he added:

"Now then, old fellow, I want you to astonish them."

He could scarcely have made a more ill-advised speech. Irritable, sensitive, easily thrown out of tune with his surroundings, Temple Debenham was precisely one of those who can do nothing to order. A speech of this kind would at any time have put him out of sympathy with his audience, but coming at this unlucky moment, it placed him in direct antagonism to them. He looked round at the crowd whom he was brought there to entertain, and he told himself that he would as soon have performed before a select society of owls. He felt that he had not a taste or sentiment in common with any one of the number. He must play to them. He was bound to play to them; but—he was not bound to please them.

"Astonish them?" he repeated. "Oh yes—I will astonish them."

And so he did. He played a piano-forte prelude and fugue by his old master, Professor Schwartz of the Zollenstrasse Academy—a marvelous composition of its kind; a miracle of learning; crabbed; scholastic; involved to the last degree, and a very curiosity of manual difficulties. This piece he played, and played superbly; but he confounded his hearers. For the first two minutes they were silent. Toward the beginning of the third minute they became restless. Then they began to whisper; and long before the middle of the fourth minute the confusion of tongues was again at its height.

Archie was aghast.

"My dear friend," he said, when it was once fairly over, "that's the most hideous thing I ever heard. How *could* you play it?"

"I played it on purpose," said Debenham.

"But nobody liked it."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I watched their faces, and they looked—"

"Bored?"

"Well, yes—bored to death."

"I meant them to be bored," replied the organist, with grim complacency. "I am delighted to know that they *were* bored. I mean to bore them again presently. My only regret is that, in order to bore them quite thoroughly, one must feed them with pearls."

"You don't call that thing a pearl," said Archie.

"A pearl of great price—a pearl of pearls—a

marvelous achievement. There is no man living, except Schwartz of Zollenstrasse, who could have written it."

"Then," said Archie, "let us pray that Schwartz of Zollenstrasse may speedily be gathered to his fathers, and leave no successor. One such master-piece is enough."

"Nevertheless, I shall give you another of them by-and-by."

But Miss Hardwicke was too experienced a hostess to permit any thing of the kind. She knew quite enough of the German school to apprehend something of the merits of the performance, but she also knew that such music was wholly unsuited to the occasion.

"It is clever enough," she said, taking her brother aside, "but no one understands it. Another piece of that kind would spoil the evening. Tell him to play Thalberg."

And Mr. Hardwicke, who obeyed his sister in every thing, went up to the piano accordingly, and requested Mr. Debenham to favor him with one of Thalberg's fantasias.

"So few persons," he said, apologetically, "are capable of rising to the level of such music as you have just been so good as to play to us. May I ask, Mr. Debenham, whether that—that sonata— Am I right in calling it a sonata?"

"It is a fugue," replied the organist, stiffly.

"Just so—a fugue. May I, then, ask whether that fugue is one of your own compositions?"

"It is by Professor Schwartz, of Zollenstrasse—am-Main," said Debenham; "the profoundest of living musicians, and one of the few surviving pupils of Beethoven."

"Professor Schwartz! I do not remember the name."

"Probably not. He is very little known in this country."

"And why so?"

"Perhaps because the English standard of taste is not sufficiently elevated."

"Ah! precisely, precisely: *caviare*, no doubt—*caviare* to the general. And now, Mr. Debenham, will you favor us with something by Thalberg?"

The musician had no resource but to comply, and so Mr. Hardwicke's guests escaped their second dose of pearls. He played Thalberg, and they listened; then a *mélange* of popular airs with showy variations, which was not only listened to, but applauded. And thus it happened that Temple Debenham made a success in spite of himself.

At a little after midnight he stole from the rooms and made his way down stairs; but was overtaken in the hall by Archibald Blyth.

"Not going?" exclaimed his friend.

"Why not? I have played three times."

"But there's supper at half past twelve!"

The organist shook his head.

"I hope to be almost home by then," he said.

"Nonsense, you don't know what you miss. Hardwicke's suppers are princely. Be persuaded, my dear fellow, and take your share of what is going."

"Not if Lucullus were host."

"But you haven't said good-night?"

"No: I depute you to say it for me. Speak the speech, I pray you, trippingly on the tongue."

"Has any one affronted you?"

"Not particularly."

"Haven't you enjoyed yourself?"

"Not particularly."

"But why? What has happened? What's wrong?"

"My dear Pylades," said Debenham, preparing to be gone, "you are gifted by Providence with an inquiring mind, and an inquiring mind is the index to a lively understanding. Judiciously cultivated, it will be a credit and a comfort to you throughout the term of your natural life. Good-night. Accept my blessing."

And so, having buttoned the frogged overcoat up to his chin, and stowed away his music in one of its many pockets, he nodded a laughing farewell, ran down the steps, and, turning his back upon the splendors of Strathellan House, plunged into the outer darkness of the Regent's Park.

Undecided whether to follow his friend or stay for supper, Archie lingered for a moment in the hall and listened to Debenham's retreating footsteps. Then appetite prevailed over friendship, and he went up stairs again.

CHAPTER VII.

AT HOME IN CANONBURY.

DEBENHAM went striding, meanwhile, along the umbrageous roadways of the Regent's Park, emerging over against the York and Albany, and striking off northward through a maze of still swarming thoroughfares. Thus he left behind him Camden Town, Somers Town, and the *terra incognita* adjacent to the Caledonian Road, and, coming upon higher ground at every step, arrived by-and-by upon the borders of that metropolitan Oberland which begins at Islington and thence reaches away to the uppermost regions of Highgate and Hampstead. But his home lay not very far within the boundaries of this high-level district. Canonbury was soon gained, and the line of market-gardens, and the modest little terrace where, in one tiny parlor window, a welcoming light was shining for him like a beacon.

Seeing that light, he sprang forward, cleared the bit of front garden at a bound, and opening the door with his latch-key, was in the room almost before she who sat there watching had recognized his footfall on the gravel.

"Ah, *Mutter*," he said, tenderly, "naughty *Mutter*! Did I not entreat you to go to bed?"

And then he kissed her, in German fashion, on both cheeks.

"My darling, I should only have lain awake till you came home. You look tired."

"Not tired, *Mutter*—only hungry. There was a grand supper in preparation up yonder; but I would not stay for it."

"That is just as I thought it would be, my son," replied Mrs. Debenham; "and your supper is ready for you. Hush! not another word till you have eaten something."

Then, moving about him in sweet motherly fashion, she took his coat, placed his plate and tumbler, and waited upon him while he ate.

"Is the house very splendid?" she asked, presently.

"Yes—after a *roturier* style."

"And the people?"

"Redolent of pounds, shillings, and pence."

She smiled, and, standing behind his chair, passed her hand lovingly through his hair.

"Was Mr. Blyth there?" she asked.

"Indeed, yes—produced in the highest style of art—*édition de luxe*—all gloves and jewelry—lost in admiration of the aldermen's wives."

"Poor Mr. Blyth! Were there many guests?"

"About four-hundred. All City people—the men made of money and the women of millinery."

"Did you converse with any of them?"

"*Merci*. I heard them talking to each other, and that was more than enough. They had but one topic—money, money, money. St. Chrysostom was not more golden-mouthed."

"And you saw no one whom you knew?"

"The virtuous and reverend Choake—looking like a canonized undertaker."

"Did he make any remark about your application for a month's holiday?"

"None. I am not sure that he saw me. He was in a state of ghostly abstraction whenever I chanced to be in his neighborhood."

"But how long is it since you wrote to him?"

"About a fortnight."

"And though he has seen you daily ever since, he has never even alluded to the letter?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders, and went on with his supper.

"He is extremely ill-mannered," said Mrs. Debenham, warmly.

"Dearest *Mutter*, I must not expect courteous treatment at the hands of the sainted Choake," replied her son, bitterly. "It is not as if I were a gentleman, you know—I am only an organist."

A faint flush rose to Mrs. Debenham's wasted cheek. She seemed about to speak; but checked herself, and sat down with a sigh.

"I have been looking up routes to-day," said the young man, presently, "and I find I must give up the Highlands. For a walking tourist with only a month at command, the distance is altogether too great. I should consume half my vacation in the journey to and fro."

"There is the railway, my son," said Mrs. Debenham; "and with the ten guineas you have earned to-night—"

"No, no, *Mutterchen*. We have no guineas to fling away. Besides, there are plenty of other places quite as interesting and more accessible. I have almost decided for the Wye, if Archie approves of it."

"For the Wye!" repeated Mrs. Debenham, in a low, tremulous voice.

"Yes—it's such a practicable tour. We could do a bit of third-class, you know, part of the way between London and Bristol; walk the rest; take the boat across to Chepstow; and fish our way the whole length of the Wye between Chepstow and Ross. I'm not sure that I don't prefer it to the Scotch scheme after all."

"The Wye!"

"Why not, *Mutter* dear? You repeat the name as if you objected to it."

"Oh no!"

"You think Scotland more bracing?"

"I was not thinking of that."

"Of what, then?"

"Of—of a Monmouthshire family. But the point in question is your holiday, my son. The Wye runs through a beautiful country."

"You have been there, mother?"

"No, I have not been there."

And again Mrs. Debenham sighed heavily.

"It is very cheap all about Monmouthshire," said the young man.

"No doubt."

"And I should not be nearly so far away from you as in the Highlands."

"That is true. I only wish—"

"That you were going too? So do I, *Mutter*, with all my heart."

"No, not that, dear, because I know it is impossible. But I wish you had a more suitable companion."

"The first two requisites in a brother pedestrian are good legs and a good temper," said Debenham, smiling; "and a more cheerful and enduring fellow than poor Archie is not to be found in the three kingdoms."

"I believe Mr. Blyth to be an excellent person," replied Mrs. Debenham; "but he is in every way your inferior."

"Indeed, he is nothing of the kind. He is far more unselfish, more good-natured, better tempered than myself; he is—"

"He is all that I admitted him to be," interrupted Mrs. Debenham, somewhat coldly. "An excellent person—not a gentleman, and therefore an unsuitable companion for my son."

The young man pushed his plate away, and rose from table.

"Alas! mother," he said, impatiently, "what better society need I hope for? My father, you tell me, was a gentleman; but what am I? An obscure musician, thankful to earn a wretched pittance by teaching tradesmen's children, and playing at tradesmen's parties! Of what use, then, to look back? Of what use to shape the sordid present upon the ruined past? Let that dead past bury its dead. Better, far better for me, had I never inherited a pride beyond my station. How much less I should have had to endure! What tortures of conscious humiliation I should have been spared!"

Mrs. Debenham pressed her hand upon her side, as if in pain.

"Oh, Temple!" she said, "you suffer, and I do not know that you suffer!"

He stooped quickly, and kissed her brow. Already ashamed of his impatience, he would have given much to recall those last few words—at all events to efface them.

"I have to bear a trifling mortification now and then," he said; "but what of that? We must both take and give blows in the battle of life, you know."

"You should neither take nor give them if I could help it," said his mother.

"But an occasional buffet is good for one's moral health. I am a fool to be fretted by these nothings, and a worse fool to speak of them."

"But what are these nothings?"

"Pshaw! mere intangibilities—shadows—trifles light as air—petty slights, petty omissions, petty exactions—things that vanish away when one attempts to define them."

"My own boy!"

"Nay, I will not be pitied. I should become an intolerable prig if the conceit were not taken out of me now and then."

"When you were a little child, I would not let the winds of heaven visit your cheek too roughly. I could protect you then. Now I am helpless."

And as she said this, Mrs. Debenham's eyes were filled with tears.

The young man bent over her, and took her hand between both his own.

"You will make me hate myself, *Mutter*, if you talk like that," he said. "You are not helpless. You are stronger than ever to help and to comfort. What should I be without you? Is it not for you, and through you, that I am what I am? But for you, should I have worked as I have worked? But for you, should I hope for riches, or dream of fame? Helpless, indeed! Why, when I become a great man, it will be you, *Mutter*, who will have made me so."

The mother smiled faintly. She was comforted, but not reassured.

"And in the mean while," she replied, "even the great men of the future are but mortal. They must sleep. They can not work all day and wake all night. It is just two o'clock."

"You ought to have been in bed, *Mutter*, three hours ago."

"And you, my son, have to be at St. Hildgarde's by eight."

"Ah, but I need so little sleep," said Debenham.

And then he lit his mother's chamber candle, held the door open for her to pass, and followed her up stairs. At her bedroom door he paused to say good-night.

"You have not told me," said she, "whether Miss Hardwicke is so handsome, after all?"

"Yes," he replied, coldly. "She is handsome."

And with that he kissed her, and ran quickly up to his own little room, *sous les toits*.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE WYE.

SCENE—a river among wooded hills; a broad, swift river broken up here and there into swirling rapids, and making at this point so deep a bend that the hills seem to close it in on every side. At the deepest point of the bend, a low wall, built of shingle and rough stones, reaching some sixteen or twenty feet into the bed of the river. No expert needs to be told that this wall, carried out as it is at an abrupt angle, is a kind of salmon trap, or rather salmon barrier, designed to keep the fish from going too far down stream. In the fore-ground (following the windings of the river, but half hidden by the trees which here grow so thickly as to form a natural avenue) a lonely turnpike road. Between this road and the river a narrow slip of meadow flat, sprinkled here and there with clumps of alder bushes. In the shade of one of these clumps of alder bushes, extended at full length on the grass, two young men, apparently both asleep, with their fishing-tackle lying beside them on the grass and their knapsacks under their heads. In the sky, not a cloud; on the road, not a wheel; in the air, not a sound. Time, some twenty minutes past four o'clock on a fiery August afternoon. Thermometer, eighty in the shade. Place, the pleasant River Wye, somewhere about half-way between Tintern and Monmouth. Characters, Temple Debenham and Archibald Blyth.

It was the fourth day of their tour. They had traveled down to Bristol by rail, crossed the Severn in a little Bristol steamer, and begun their pedestrian work at Chepstow. At Chepstow they had climbed the Windcliff, seen the town and the ruins, and done all that Black's Guide demands from the conscientious tourist. From Chepstow they had walked to Tintern, and at Tintern had spent one clear day and two nights, sketching, fishing, exploring the neighborhood, and getting the beautiful old abbey off by heart. This brought them to the morning of the fourth day. On the afternoon of that fourth day, however (having lingered at Tintern till the sun was already high, and being as yet not well broken in to their work), the unwonted heat and the unwonted exercise began to tell upon them. As the day advanced the miles seemed to grow longer, and their knapsacks heavier. At length they fairly gave in, and although they had already voted half an hour for luncheon, were fain to call a second halt at four, and lie down in the first shady nook they could find by the way. Here they fell asleep to the pleasant music of the river; or rather Archie slept, while Debenham, lying with closed eyes, inhaling the fragrance of the unmown grass, and listening to the cool lapsing of the current among the rushes hard by, suffered his thoughts to drift on vaguely toward the border land of dreams. Whither they so drifted, what fragmentary recollections of the happy student-life left behind in Germany, what half-defined hopes and plans for

the uncertain future, what subtle threads of melody, what passing pictures of places and people, what echoes of wild *studenten lieder*, what rhymes and fancies and caprices flitted, shadow-like, across his mind, he could not himself have remembered when once the mood was past and the reverie broken.

Rousing himself at length by an effort, he brought out a pipe from the depths of one of his pockets, filled it, lit it, and, leaning on his elbow, smoked contemplatively. It was a regular student's pipe—such a pipe as one sees by hundreds in the streets of Heidelberg and Bonn—a pipe with a flexible tube, and a long china bowl capped with a metal lid and chain, and adorned with a painting of the inevitable German *mädchen* peeping out from a wreath of vine leaves. It was a shabby old pipe—a dear old pipe—the friend of years. It had been given to him by a brother-student at Zollenstrasse long, long ago, when the brother-student went away to fill a musical professorship in some Austrian college; and he had kept it ever since. Only the smoker knows how true and intimate a friend a pipe may become. Only Debenham himself knew to what good resolutions, to what brave aspirations, to what dreamy and pathetic melodies that shabby old pipe had given birth. And now, as he lit and smoked it, looking up to the blue sky and the green leaves overhead, and listening to the hum of insect life in the deep grass round about, there came upon him a delicious sense of rest and thankfulness. The strug-



"ROUSING HIMSELF AT LENGTH BY AN EFFORT, HE BROUGHT OUT A PIPE," ETC.

gles and annoyances, the poverty and privation of the last eighteen months seemed to vanish away "into thin air." He felt once more free—free from the daily drudgery of St. Hildegarde, and the spiritual rule of the Rev. Tobias Choake; from the dull round of suburban teaching; and, above all, from Messrs. Stampf and Hammerfest's new patent double-action grand. Here were a hundred and thirty—more than a hundred and thirty miles, and the breadth of the Bristol Channel, between himself and London. East, west, north, south, were alike open to him. He had but to shoulder his knapsack, set his face to whichever point of the compass he pleased, walk where he pleased, halt where he pleased, sleep where he pleased. The world was all before him where to choose—for six weeks. Yes, for six whole, delightful weeks. He had applied for only a month; but in Mr. Choake's reply, which came the very day after the Strathellan House entertainment, he begged to inform Mr. Debenham that the parish church of St. Hildegarde-the-Martyr was about to be closed during the space of six weeks for purposes of repairing and whitewashing, and that he, Mr. Debenham, was therefore at liberty to absent himself during the whole or any part of that time according to his, Mr. Debenham's, convenience. The same post also brought Mr. Hardwicke's check for "ten pounds and ten shillings sterling;" so that both funds and holiday came together. Archie Blyth, who was employed in one of Mr. Hardwicke's City offices, had in the mean while obtained his own annual furlough; and here they now were, knapsacks, sketch-books, fishing-rods, and all, in the fourth day of their tour.

Debenham smoked his pipe out in quiet enjoyment, and then proceeded to refill it.

"Archie," he said, "Archie, do you mean to wake to-day?"

An inarticulate murmur was Archie's only reply.

"Because, if we are to sleep at Monmouth to-night, we have eight, if not ten miles yet to do—besides catching our fish for supper."

Another inarticulate murmur, of which the only intelligible word was "chops."

"Chops!" echoed the organist, in a burst of virtuous indignation. "Who dares to utter the ignoble name of chops? Archie, I blush for you."

"Such a bore to do any thing," pleaded Archie; "and chops are cheap."

"Base is the slave that pays!"

"Besides, we were an hour and twenty minutes yesterday at Tintern before we caught any thing."

"Sport, Archie—sport."

"Hang sport! Especially if it comes at the end of a long day's work, when a fellow's hot and hungry, and wants his dinner," said Archie, with a tremendous yawn.

"Sordid, unfeeling reprobate—degraded, spiritless outcast," quoted Debenham, with a flourish of his pipe.

Archie sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Gracious heavens!" said he. "That's powerful language. What a fortune you must have had spent on your education!"

Debenham laughed.

"Nay," he said, "the fortune—if fortune and I are ever to come together—must be got out of

my education, for it certainly was never put into it. I don't believe my college fees ever came to more than fifteen pounds a year."

"Fifteen pounds a year!"

"Ay—and not even to that when I had once begun to go in for prizes and competitions, and so on. I was gaining money all the last two years at Zollenstrasse; and if I had staid on, I should have been full professor, perhaps *kappelmeister*, by this time."

"Ah, but then you're such a wonderful fellow!" said Archie, meditatively.

"Delighted to hear it."

"You know such lots of things, I mean. You can do any thing you choose."

"Can I, by Jove! I'll trouble you to prove your proposition. I *choose* to earn a thousand a year. Tell me how to do that, and I'll be vastly obliged to you."

"You will never do it by music," said Archie.

"I fear that's true."

"But then music is not your only resource. As I said just now, you know such lots of things."

"True, again, my friend. I know how to eat *sauer-kraut* and drink lager beer; how to make potato *kücken*; how to sew on a button; and how to sit through a German tea-party without yawning oftener than once in every quarter of an hour."

"Nonsense, Debenham; you know that's not what I mean."

"Then explain—not forgetting how I am to earn that thousand a year."

"You'll never earn it by music, as I said before; but I don't see why, with your education, you should not earn it some other way," said Archie, sententiously. "There are mathematics, for instance, and languages—why, you know five or six languages, don't you?"

"Thoroughly well, only two—namely, German and French. Italian and Spanish I read, but that is all; and as for classics—well, I should never make a Heine nor a Bentley, though I were to give up my life to the work as they did; but I have as fair a share of Latin and Greek as most outsiders. But why do you ask? Would you have me turn usher in a school, or tutor in a nobleman's family?"

"I'd have you take to commerce," said Archie.

Temple Debenham took his pipe from his lips, and half rose upon his elbow.

"Commerce!" he ejaculated. "Well, you could scarcely have suggested any thing for which I am in every way less suited."

"How so?"

"Because I detest trade—because I am so unfortunate as to have the tastes and prejudices of a gentleman—because I have not received a commercial education—because—"

"Because, in fact, you know nothing about commerce," said Archie, warmly; "not even the meaning of the word."

"My dear fellow, I do know the meaning of the word. Commerce means capital, of which I have not a farthing. Commerce means book-keeping (double and single entry), the mysteries of which are inscrutable to me. Commerce means iron, cotton, hides, indigo, molasses. Good heavens! what do I know, or care to know, about iron, cotton, hides, indigo, or molasses? What is the use of indigo? Does any one ever buy indigo? Does any one eat molasses?"

"If I knew German and French as well as I know English, and could read and answer a letter in Spanish or Italian," said Archie, "I should now be drawing six hundred a year instead of two." And if, added to all that, I was a really clever man, and besides being a really clever man, was a skilled mathematician, classical scholar, and so forth, and had that broad way of thinking that comes of a liberal education, I should be worth—well, I scarcely know how much I should not be worth to my employer. A man of commanding abilities is as valuable in commerce as elsewhere, if only he devotes those abilities to his work.

"Put Pegasus to the plow, in short, and he will excel Dobbin. Many thanks. I have no mind to supersede Dobbin."

"You work harder than Dobbin as it is, my dear Pegasus," said Archie.

"Possibly."

"And the labor is not all of the most celestial kind."

Debenham was silent.

Presently a little lad came down from the high-road, driving a cow to water; and the cow looked at the travelers with her large, placid brown eyes, and waded in among the rushes, close beside where they lay in the shade of the alder bushes. And then Debenham looked at his watch, and found that it was nearly six o'clock. So they got up, lazily enough, shouldered their knapsacks, and again followed the road, which still followed the river. The sun, though less oppressive than it had been some hours earlier, still glowed above the heights to their left, and the dusty road took the impress of their feet at every step. All was silent, verdant, monotonous. Here were none of those riven, fantastic rocks that castellate the banks of the Wye at Chepstow, and crown them with precipices at Symond's Yat; but only hills—rounded, undulating hills, partly wooded, partly cultivated, with here and there a mansion "bosom'd high in tufted trees," or a boat-house down among the rushes. It was the scenery of Tintern, in short; but Tintern without the abbey. Through this scenery, prolonged and reiterated mile after mile, league after league, the young men had been traveling all day; but to them, weary of London and London work, it had not seemed monotonous. Laughing and chatting as they trudged along, they had enjoyed every foot of the way.

Now, however, the gayety and the travel-talk seemed suddenly to have evaporated from them. Debenham had become all at once moody and absorbed. He strode on in silence; his brows bent, his eyes fixed upon the ground. He was evidently revolving some painful subject in his mind. Once or twice he opened his lips as if to speak, but checked himself each time, and relapsed into a still gloomier silence. Now and then he quickened his pace impatiently.

In the mean while Archie, observant of these signs and tokens, made no effort to renew the conversation. Suddenly, however, having walked some three or four miles farther, they came to a bend in the road, and all was changed. The river widened out before them, one sheet of molten gold. A picturesque hamlet lay clustered about the water's edge, not an eighth of a mile ahead. There were boats drawn up along the shelving bank, and women standing on the thresh-

olds of their cottages with babies in their arms. The ferry was just crossing with a freight of cattle. A little knot of boatmen and laborers had gathered about the landing-place. There was a cart at the inn-door, waiting to cross at the next passage; and the inn itself, a very bower of greenery, with all its windows winking in the sun, looked as if it had been put there by Birket Foster's own hand.

This sudden change from solitude to habitation—from silence to the stir and hum of life—was so cheerful and unexpected, that the young men uttered a simultaneous exclamation.

"I vote we go no farther to-night," said Archie.

"Agreed."

"Proposed, seconded, and carried, without a dissentient voice."

"Provided always that we find accommodation," added Debenham.

"Nothing to fear on that head," said Archie, confidently. "This is the sort of place where nobody stays. The tourists all go on to Monmouth."

Debenham shook his head, and pointed to a spot on the opposite side of the river.

"Not all," said he. "There's an artist at work over yonder—regularly encamped, too—seems to have contrived some sort of temporary tent between the trees. He's staying at the inn, depend on it; and probably not alone. Painters run in packs at this time of the year—where you find one, you generally find more. I shall not be surprised if the place is full."

The place, however, was not full. The landlady, plump and smiling, hastened out to bid them welcome. Her two front bedrooms were engaged, and her only sitting-room; but she had two little bedrooms at the back of the house; and if the gentlemen would not mind eating their supper in the kitchen—

The gentlemen minded nothing. They engaged the rooms without even looking at them, left their knapsacks at the bar, asked a question or two about the fishing, and then, following the landlady's instructions, went up the river to a point about half a mile above the ferry, to seek their supper. Here, in the course of some three-quarters of an hour, Debenham landed a plump salmon-trout weighing nearly four pounds. With this prize they returned, like *Piscator* and *Venator*, to their "honest ale-house," gave in their fish to be cooked, and were shown to their rooms—two tiny pigeon-holes at the back of the house, clean as convent cells, fragrant of lavender, and overlooking a cabbage-garden.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE PORCH.

HAVING supped upon their salmon-trout—excellently cooked and smoking hot, albeit served in the kitchen upon wooden-ware, and washed down by potations of cider from an "Uncle Toby" mug—the travelers went out to sit a while under the porch, and smoke their pipes in the gloaming.

The evening was supremely calm. The golden glow had not yet quite faded out of the sky; but in the valley it was already night. All was silent. Here and there, a cold gleam on the

river—here and there, a flickering light in some cottage window—now and then a distant bark—a footstep on the road—a passing “good-night.” In the shadows that mystery, in the leaves that whispering, in the air that living stillness which are the poetry of night.

The young men sat in the porch, one at each side of the door, and both silent. To their right lay the kitchen, which was not only kitchen, but bar and tap-room as well; to their left the parlor, now given up exclusively to the artist, whose encampment they had seen on the opposite bank some two or three hours before. His name was Alleyne. He was accompanied by his daughter, and they had already been more than three weeks in their present quarters. The name of the village was Cillingford—so called because the Cilling, a small stream coming from the hills, there emptied itself into the Wye. And the inn was known as “The Silver Trout.” All these particulars they had learned from their landlady during supper.

They sat there, it has been already said, in silence; partly because the evening lay about them so still and sacred—partly, also, from a sense of restraint; for the parlor window was wide open, and the room seemed full of light. The blind, however, was drawn down, and all within was profoundly quiet. Not a word, not a movement was audible. Not even a shadow moved across the blind. If any one had stirred or whispered, they must have heard it; and yet they felt, somehow, that the room was not empty. Half an hour went by thus. Then Archie, unable to control his natural restlessness any longer, got up and went down to the river-side, where he amused himself by playing at ducks and drakes in the moonlight.

At the same instant that he strode away some one moved in the parlor, and a peevish voice said:

“My dear child, what are you doing?”

To which the silveriest and sweetest voice that Debenham had ever heard replied:

“Nothing, father. I have not stirred.”

“What waked me, then?”

“Footsteps outside, I think. Some person has been sitting in the porch, smoking, and has just gone away.”

“Smoking, was he? Ay—I smell the tobacco. Common enough too. Faugh!”

Debenham put out his pipe.

Presently the man's voice began again.

“How long have I slept?”

“About three-quarters of an hour.”

“And you were reading. Let me see—what were you reading, my love?”

“About the clouds, *padre mio*; and you were so soon lost in them that I closed the book before getting to the end of a single page. It was dreadfully tedious. It nearly sent me to sleep, too.”

“Tedious, my dear? Oh, fie! Ruskin is never tedious.”

“Ah, yes, I know that is treason,” laughed the girlish voice; “but how is it, then, that somebody always falls asleep when I take up a volume of ‘Modern Painters?’”

“Because, my darling, you always take it up after dinner. You are not putting the wine away?”

“Indeed I am, Sir, having just rung for tea.

Besides, there is exactly enough left for to-morrow. Shall I draw up the blind?”

“And fill the room with bats and moths? No, thank you. A little evening society would be pleasant enough; but not of that sort. Good heavens! how dull this place is!”

Here Debenham, who had leaned eagerly forward in the hope of seeing the window opened, heard a sound as of the pushing back of a chair, and of footsteps slowly pacing to and fro.

“It is quiet,” replied the sweet young voice, after a brief pause; “but then it is very beautiful. And you are not dull, dear, when you are at work. Besides, the picture is going on so well.”

“I am not sure of that. I was strongly inclined to rip it across with my penknife this afternoon.”

“And Lord Wyelands?”

“*Que le diable l'emporte!* I hate commission pictures. I have never had the least satisfaction in painting one—never. I have heard Jasper Chrome say the same thing. The mere fact that the picture was already priced and purchased seemed, he said, to paralyze him. And it is quite true—and quite reasonable. The thing is never your own. You can't even exhibit it without permission. There are no hopes or fears connected with it. You have only one man to please instead of the whole public. Pshaw! I wish I had never undertaken it.”

“Dearest father, Mr. Chrome's sentiments are the sentiments of a Bohemian. If he prefers uncertainty to certainty, it is because he has all a gambler's love of excitement.”

The footsteps came to a sudden halt.

“Bohemian, indeed!” said the artist, irritably. “That is a ridiculous word, Juliet—a most ridiculous word. A mere scrap of French slang. I hope I shall never hear you make use of it again. Is that tea never coming?”

“I will ring again,” said the young lady, gently.

And then Debenham heard the bell tinkle in the kitchen, and saw a shadow flit across the blind. He knew now that her name was Juliet—a sweet name linked to a still sweeter voice! He longed to see her face. If she would but come to the window and look out upon the moonlight! If even he could see her shadow more distinctly on the blind! And still he sat there in the leafy porch, scarcely daring to breathe, glancing every now and then in the direction of the river, and dreading lest Archie should come back and break the spell. Then he heard the tea brought in; and by-and-by, after some minutes of silence, the artist spoke again.

“Have you seen or heard any thing of those two men who are putting up here to-night?” he asked, abruptly.

“Not since we caught that glimpse of them as they went up the river,” was the reply.

“Humph! I wonder who and what they are.”

“The tall one looked gentlemanly,” said the sweet voice.

Debenham's lips quivered with just the faintest smile of gratified self-love.

“If one could only have them in, and get up a rubber! I would give any thing to-night for a hand at whist.”



"SMOKING, WAS HE? AY—I SMELL THE TOBACCO."

Debenham's thoughts reverted to his knapsack. It contained, alas! no evening suit; but he remembered that he had a pair of black kid gloves and a black silk neck-tie, both new, in the compartment where he kept his papers.

"Will a game at chess do as well, *padre mio?*"

"Good heavens! no. I am bored to death as it is; but a game at chess— By-the-way, —et, have you reminded the landlady to

send into Monmouth for the curry-powder and olives?"

"Yes; and for some books also. We have come almost to the end of our own, and Mrs. Jones's library contains only Foxe's 'Martyrs', Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and Walton's 'Angler,' in addition to her Prayer-Book and family Bible."

"Then Mrs. Jones's library does her infinite credit. Three excellent books, Juliet—stand-

ards, every one. I should not really have expected to find three such excellent books in a little river-side inn in Monmouthshire. You may give me that volume of Balzac—the third to your right, my darling, at the end of the shelf.”

“You would not prefer me to borrow one of Mrs. Jones’s standards for you, Sir?”

“*Comme l’esprit vient aux filles!* No, my little mocking-bird, certainly not. I am too old for Messrs. Foxe and Bunyan. As the cares of life press upon us, we want amusement. Heavy reading for the young, light reading for the old; that is my theory. So, you see, the levity of the one is corrected and the gravity of the other relieved. This tea is wretched stuff, my darling. If we are to stay here for another month, I must positively send to London for something more drinkable.”

“Perhaps the second cup will be better.”

“Thanks, I do not care to try. I think I will go outside and smoke a cigar.”

These last words sounded Debenham’s retreat. As Mr. Alleyne opened the parlor door he stole noiselessly from the porch, and when that gentleman had lighted his cigar in the kitchen and emerged into the moonlight, Debenham was sauntering to and fro within a few yards of the house.

CHAPTER X.

MR. ALLEYNE.

TEMPLE DEBENHAM was not a sociable man. His manner was cold; he disliked strangers; and strangers, for the most part, disliked him; yet he became acquainted with Mr. Alleyne in the course of a few minutes. A passing salutation as their paths crossed in the moonlight—a remark when it came to the next turn, on the beauty of the night—a halt on both sides—a word or two about fishing, and the thing was done. By the time that Archie, attracted by the sound of their voices, gave up his ducks and drakes and came up from the landing-place, he found his friend and Mr. Alleyne in active conversation.

Seen by this imperfect light, Mr. Alleyne showed as a short, plump, fresh-colored, pleasant-looking man, of about fifty-five years of age. His hair was almost white, but curling and abundant. He smiled a good deal; and his teeth were faultless. He was well, though somewhat carelessly, dressed. He wore a high collar, a frilled shirt-front, and a diamond ring on his little finger. His hands were particularly white and well-shaped; and he had the air of a *bon-vivant*. No one would ever have taken him for an artist. He indulged neither in long hair nor mustaches, nor velvet coats, nor gorgeous cravats, nor hats of boundless brim. He looked, on the contrary, like a pleasant, gentlemanly, easy-going diner-out of the old school, and was precisely the sort of man whom one is accustomed to encounter at “the breathing time of day” along the shady side of Pall Mall.

“A dull place,” he was saying, as Archie came up—“a wretched place. I have been here three weeks, and am degenerating daily. In three weeks more I shall become a savage

—a quadruped—a *bête farouche*. I shall browse. I shall chew the cud. Fancy living one’s life in such a wilderness!”

“The Wye is very lovely about here,” said Debenham, smiling.

“But the accommodation abominable. Believe me, Sir, the finest scenery in the world is improved by a good hotel in the fore-ground.”

“Then you do not approve of the ‘Silver Trout?’”

Mr. Alleyne shrugged his shoulders, and shrugged them as a Frenchman does, significantly, yet almost imperceptibly. Before Debenham had spent an hour in his society, he discovered that Mr. Alleyne had many of the small habits of a Frenchman; but then he performed them with all a Frenchman’s dexterity, so that even the shrug, which, as De Quincey says, is “an odious gesture,” sat airily and almost gracefully upon him.

“Not so,” he replied. “I cordially approve of the ‘Silver Trout’—for the frequenters of the ‘Silver Trout.’ *Voilà tout.*”

“You have had it pretty much to yourself here, I suppose, Sir,” said Archie, speaking for the first time.

Mr. Alleyne turned his head sharply, as if at once detecting the difference of tone and address.

“Yes,” he said, somewhat more distantly.

“We have had it entirely to ourselves. One is quite out of the world at Cillingford.”

Then, turning again to Debenham, he added:

“Your arrival is an unprecedented event.

No one comes here. I believe that no one ever has come here since the beginning of time. The place is a *terra incognita* to the civilized world—known only to a few ancient Britons in coracles, and other outer barbarians. Have you seen any coracles on the river yet?”

Debenham had not yet seen any—confessed, indeed, that he did not even know what a coracle was.

“If I seem to be very ignorant,” he said, “I must plead that I have been brought up and educated abroad, and am almost a stranger in my own country.”

“You might have lived all your life in England, and yet be as ignorant,” Mr. Alleyne replied. “A coracle is a sort of rude boat made of tarred hides and osier boughs—just the shape of a turtle-shell. Cæsar describes them, you may remember, and says he learned the use of them from the Britons. And here you find them on the Wye, and on most of the Welsh rivers, to this day. They are very curious. I mean to buy one, and take it home for a model. May I offer you a cigar?”

Debenham, remembering what had been said of his own tobacco, declined; but Archie accepted one, and even before he had lighted it, broke into praises of its fragrance.

The artist received this tribute with easy complacency.

“Yes,” he said, “they are part of a case I shared the other day with a Portuguese friend. They come direct from Havana. You do not object to the perfume of vanilla? I always keep a small piece of vanilla in my cigar-case. A simple luxury—allow me to recommend it.”

Chatting thus, they walked up and down for some twenty minutes or more, Mr. Alleyne lead-

ing the conversation; Debenham putting in an observation here and there; Archibald Blyth puffing away in serene enjoyment, and listening to all that the others were saying. Garrulous enough at most times, the City man felt, somehow or another, an "exposition" of silence upon him in Mr. Alleyne's presence. But he wanted his friend to play a more important part in the conversation, and was somewhat jealous that the stranger should have all the talk to himself.

Mr. Alleyne, however, conversed like a man who was accustomed to have the talk to himself, and Debenham seemed willing enough to drop into the position of listener. The artist was amusing. He contrived, within the space of those twenty minutes, to touch upon a variety of topics. If he did not talk in epigrams like a light-comedy wit, there was, at all events, an epigrammatic flavor about what he said. His style was light and easy. His voice was agreeable. Perhaps he sprinkled his conversation too liberally with French phrases, scraps of quotation, and the names of titled persons. Perhaps, like Chaucer's sergeant of the law, who, though a busy man, seemed "busier than he was," Mr. Alleyne, though a clever talker, had the art of saying things in a way that made them seem cleverer than they were. But, in any case, he was entertaining, and evidently a man of the world.

At last, when Archie had reluctantly cast aside the stump of his cigar, Mr. Alleyne asked if they would go in and take tea.

"It is wretched stuff," he said, "and half cold by this time—and the room is a mere kennel, about twelve feet square. I am ashamed to ask you into it."

The young men looked at each other. Debenham hesitated.

"We are pedestrians," he said, "and carry our wardrobes on our shoulders. I fear we can scarcely present ourselves before a lady—in the evening—"

Mr. Alleyne cut his apology short with a wave of the hand.

"Living as we live here beyond the pale of civilization," he said, smiling, "we have almost forgotten that smock-frocks and high-lows are not *de rigueur* in the best circles. Pray dismiss every consideration of that kind, and only remember that we are living in the dreariest exile. Think what it would have been to Robinson Crusoe had a couple of civilized strangers dropped in one evening to tea!"

With this he led the way, and the young men followed him.

Temple Debenham had too early been brought face to face with the hard realities of life to retain any of the mere timidity of youth. As a boy, indeed, he was more than commonly self-reliant, and as a young man he prided himself upon his habitual *sang froid*. And yet at this moment, for no cause whatever, he felt his cheek flush and his breath come quicker. What was it? Why was it? But he had no time even to ask himself these questions; much less to answer them.

CHAPTER XI.

MUSICAL AND ÆSTHETIC.

THEY found a little room, poorly furnished, but brightly lighted, the tea still upon the table, and a young lady standing by the fire-place reading. Her book lay open before her on the mantle-piece. She closed it when they came in, and received them courteously. Mr. Alleyne then tasted the tea, pronounced it undrinkable, rang for a fresh supply, produced a port-folio of sketches; and made his guests at home in a few moments.

Archie, painfully conscious of his clump-soled boots, sat on the edge of his chair, silent and shy, lamenting the gorgeous shirt-fronts and resplendent waistcoats that he had left at home in his London lodgings.

Debenham, feigning to be absorbed in the sketches, saw only Miss Alleyne.

He thought he had never beheld so dainty a creature. He scarcely dared to look at her, and yet he could not keep his eyes away. She was small—very small—exquisitely proportioned, dark-haired, dark-eyed, with the slenderest throat, the tiniest hands, the sweetest mouth imaginable. Her eyes were large, lustrous, "changeable as the winds or seas;" her complexion of that pure, glowing, transparent olive which the French describe as the *peau méridionale*, and which, when pale, is the most pathetic, and, when flushed, the most radiant in the world. But it was neither to the lustre of her eyes, nor the splendor of her skin, nor the supple grace of her figure, that Miss Alleyne owed the great charm of her beauty. It was to her smile. That smile was magical. Taken in repose, the face wore a thoughtful expression that bordered upon melancholy; but the smile transformed it, illuminated it, flooded it like sudden sunshine. Debenham saw it for the first time before he had been half an hour in her presence, and it was one of her father's sketches that called it forth.

Taking the drawing from the folio—a river scene, with flat, low banks, a line of pollard willows, and a punt moored against a speary "plump" of bulrushes—Mr. Alleyne turned it toward her, and said:

"Juliet, do you remember the bull?"

She had been sitting by till then, silent enough, with her face half averted, and her cheek resting on her hand; but the flash of mirth came on the instant, lightening over every feature.

"Shall I ever forget the bull—or you," she replied; "or the tragical end of the sketching umbrella?"

And then Mr. Alleyne laughed too, and told them how he had been besieged by a bull while peacefully sketching his own punt from the opposite side of the river; and how, being unable to get at the punt and unable to swim, he had contrived to clamber up a tree, while the bull made war *à outrance* on the sketching umbrella.

"I never remember that adventure," said he, "without marveling at my own activity."

"If you could but have seen yourself, papa, as I saw you when I came to row you back," said Miss Alleyne, "perched in the tree like some strange bird, brooding over the ruins of the umbrella!"

"If you could but have seen the bull, my love, defying it, bellowing at it, stalking round

it, goring it, tossing it, trampling upon it! It was a sight for Landseer. He was a magnanimous bull, however, to give him his due. He respected the fine arts, and spared my sketch-book."

"And this happened lately, on the Wye?" said Debenham; asking the question for the sake of saying something.

"Oh no! it happened at a little place in Hertfordshire, where we spent a few days in the spring. Do you know the neighborhood of Berkhamstead?"

The young man shook his head.

"I am quite a stranger in England," he replied. "I left it when a child, and only came back some eighteen months ago."

"Then you have traveled a great deal?"

"No; we were always at Zollenstrasse. I was educated there."

Mr. Alleyne had heard of Zollenstrasse—had passed once within a few miles of the frontier—had known some one who afterward became a professor at the Academy. This set them talking more freely; and as Mr. Alleyne, in his airy way, asked a multiplicity of questions, it was not long before Debenham had been led into an unwonted degree of expansiveness, telling his name and his profession, and even drawing, in some half-dozen sentences, a sarcastic sketch of the Grand-Ducal court, and the formal life of that self-important little capital. He described a court-day at the Residenz—the washer-women bringing home the ladies' founced petticoats dangling from long poles, as if they were some kind of portentous fish just caught—the Lord High Chamberlain, in his nankeen morning-coat, trotting home, bareheaded, from Kopf the barber's, not daring to put on his hat for fear of disturbing the hair-powder—the six tall cuirassiers, who were regularly selected from the *corps de garde* and transformed into footmen for the day, to swell the somewhat scanty pomp of the Grand-Ducal establishment—the old yellow chariot from the Hôtel des Rois, which all Zollenstrasse wanted to hire at the same moment, and which was to be seen in every part of the town at once, throughout the afternoon—the gentlemen who had walked, dusting their pumps and shaking out their ruffles in the entrance-hall of the palace—the Baroness von Schlitte and the Baroness von Pfeffer squabbling for precedence in the ante-room—the Grand Duke yawning behind the plume of his cocked hat—the Grand Duchess scolding the princesses for tittering—the gentlemen ushers and the gold-sticks in waiting cutting jokes on the sly—the dust, the fuss, the flutter, the bustle that pervaded the whole town from seven in the morning till five in the afternoon; and the relief it was to every one concerned when the gun up at the old Schloss gave notice that the Residenz gates were about to be closed, and the reception was over.

All this he told, and told it with humor; for Miss Alleyne, though still sitting somewhat apart, listened and smiled; and each time she smiled he thought her more bewitching than before, and longed to make her smile again.

Then the conversation drifted into more serious channels. Zollenstrasse led, somehow, to Munich; and then they talked of German music and poetry—of Goethe, and the wonderful Weimar period—of Wagner, and King Ludwig of Bavaria.

"As for Carl August," said Mr. Alleyne, "he has been so effaced by Goethe that the world has scarcely done him full justice. He was almost a great man."

"Must he not have been quite great, so to appreciate greatness?" asked Miss Alleyne.

"He was certainly a magnanimous man," said Debenham; "for Goethe, with his Olympian airs, his pomposity, and his infinite egotism, must have been a difficult person to deal with. Merely to have been the friend of such a man, and to have maintained that friendship unimpaired, without loss of dignity, throughout a period of fifty-five years, augurs a high degree of forbearance."

"It was an unequal friendship, too," observed Miss Alleyne.

"And unequal friendships are as full of shoals and quicksands as unequal marriages," said Mr. Alleyne, sententiously.

"It was unequal in a manner particularly trying to the Duke," said Debenham; "for all the rank was on his side, and all the fame on Goethe's."

"Yet the Duke must have been an able man," said Miss Alleyne.

"The Duke was a very able man," replied her father; "but he was able as a statesman and reformer; so that, his field of operation being small, his abilities went for nothing in the eyes of the world. He must have felt this, and chafed under it; for, after all, it is not pleasant to be obliterated, even by the friends we love best."

"Was Mr. Blyth also a Zollenstrasse student?" asked the young lady; thinking, perhaps, that poor Archie was undergoing that very process of obliteration, and kindly trying to give him some share in the conversation.

Archie blushed up to the eyes.

"I?" he stammered. "Oh no. I was at 'Merchant Taylors.' But I've been in Germany. I've been up the Rhine."

"The one place in Germany that I have now any special desire to visit is Munich," said the artist. "Vienna and Dresden I know by heart; but the treasures of the Pinacothek I have yet to see. I should not wish to die without having seen Titian's 'Presentation in the Temple.'"

"And I would give the world to hear *Tannhäuser*, and see Herr Wagner!" said his daughter.

"Mr. Debenham has, no doubt, done both, and can give us every information."

But Debenham had never been in Munich, nor, though the music of it was familiar to him, heard *Tannhäuser* performed. He had, however, seen not only Herr Wagner, but his eccentric friend and patron, the ex-King of Bavaria; both having been present at one of the great Zollenstrasse festivals some three years before.

"On which occasion," said he, "a symphony of Herr Wagner's was performed by the orchestra of the Academy; and a more crabbed, distorted, and singular composition I never took part in before or since. Yet there were wild, wonderful fragments of melody cropping up throughout it, in all sorts of unexpected places; often quite lost to sight—buried in the heart of the score, like diamonds in a block of quartz, and only discoverable by an adept. I remember one little passage of about four bars played by the

oboe—a delicate, airy, exquisite flight of notes that haunted me for weeks after; but it was imbedded in a crash of other instruments, and probably not a soul among the audience, unless it were King Ludwig, even suspected its existence."

"Then there may really be a soul of beauty in things discordant!" said Miss Alleyne, smiling.

"In Wagner's music—yes; but you must be an analyst to find it out."

"Is King Ludwig an analyst?"

"King Ludwig is not a Pericles, nor even a second Carl August; but he has a real knowledge and real love of art," replied Debenham. "Whether he is an analyst, in the technical sense, I can not say; but he has insight; and it needs insight to pierce the rough, and sometimes grotesque husk in which Wagner chooses to swathe his musical ideas. He has as rich a vein of mere melody as other composers, but he values it less, and employs it differently. His whole career, we must remember, is a reaction against the school of melodists—his every composition a protest against Bellini and the followers of Bellini. Like all reactionists, however, he pushes his theory too far. He is not content to deny that melody is of paramount importance in music. He is not content to establish melody and harmony on a footing of equality. He insists on degrading melody. He uses it as a mere accessory—as the cheapest of accessories; and lavishes it just where it is least observed and least needed."

"Like the Count of Monte Christo, who wore no jewels, but caused a priceless emerald to be hollowed out, to make a box for his opium lozenges," said Miss Alleyne.

"Mr. Debenham is the first admirer of Wagner whom I have had the pleasure of conversing with," observed the artist.

"Pardon me," replied Debenham. "I do not class myself with Herr Wagner's admirers. I recognize his talent, but I entirely disapprove of his style. I hold that beauty is the end of art, as truth is the end of science; and I can not but regard music from which melody is banished (or in which melody is so far obscured as to be virtually banished) as essentially inartistic. Still the composer of *Tannhäuser* is a man of mark."

"And originality."

"Oh, he is startlingly original. There is but one Wagner."

"And Ludwig of Bavaria is his prophet! We painters, however, have no right to poke our fun at the ex-king. No living sovereign has done so much for contemporary art."

"Why, then, deny him the title of a second Carl August?" asked Miss Alleyne.

"Goethe's Duke, my love, always kept up his personal dignity. He never said or did any thing to make himself absurd in the eyes of the world; but King Ludwig is—well, suppose we say impulsive, and his impulsiveness has led him into many follies. His quarrels and reconciliations with Herr Wagner alone are notoriously ludicrous."

"Still, if he has so much taste and cultivation—if he is such a liberal patron of the arts—"

"I fear, even so, that he will not bear comparison with so noble and steadfast a man as

Carl August," said Debenham. "Or, at best, we must regard him as a mere whimsical, erratic, half-pathetic, half-ludicrous imitation—like the jester at the funeral pageant of a Roman emperor, whose office it was to strut in the robes and mimic the bearing of 'imperial Caesar dead and turned to clay.'"

"And your own Grand Duke—he of Zollenstrasse—is he musical?" asked Mr. Alleyne.

"He partakes of the nature of the Academy," replied Debenham, laughingly. "He is a little of every thing. He paints a little, composes a little, models a little; handles a lathe as dextrously as a bow, and turns a tune or a needle-case with equal facility."

"I hope you do not imply that your academic studies at Zollenstrasse are conducted on that principle!"

"With this difference—each student learns a great deal of something, and a little of every thing."

"And you, I suppose, learned a great deal of music and a little of the fine arts. Do you paint?"

"I sketch—very indifferently. One can not help it when half one's fellow-students are artists," replied the young man, apologetically.

"I hope you will let us see your sketch-book."

But Debenham protested he had not courage to show it; and so, the inn-clock in the kitchen loudly striking eleven, he rose to say good-night.

"There, I have frightened you away," said the artist. "But I think you will let me see it to-morrow, all the same. Shall you be here to-morrow?"

"Oh yes; we shall be here to-morrow."

"I don't ask if you make any stay; it's such a wretched place, and the river is so much finer higher up."

"I can scarcely tell," replied Debenham, with an air of great indifference. "It depends on the fishing. If we get very good sport here, we may stay some days."

"Then I hope you may get excellent sport," said Mr. Alleyne. "What—you will go? Then good-night."

And so they shook hands, and parted; but Debenham did not dare to offer his hand to Miss Alleyne. He only bowed profoundly, and Archie, who was just stepping forward with outstretched palm, checked himself, and bowed also.

"I suppose that's foreign manners, old fellow," he said, as they went up stairs.

"Foreign manners! what do you mean?"

"Why, not shaking hands with Miss What's-her-name."

"I know little enough of English manners," replied Debenham, "so I can not tell where mine differ from them; but abroad, certainly, no man would venture to shake hands with a young unmarried lady. It would be an unheard-of liberty."

"You did not even say good-night to her. Would that also have been a liberty?"

"I think so. What right have I to wish her a good-night? Had it been her birthday, should I have presumed to wish her many happy returns of the day?"

"Not if that's the light in which you look at it; but it's an artificial light, to my thinking."

I prefer English manners. I should have liked to shake hands with her—I should, uncommonly."

"Well, good-night," said Debenham, abruptly.

They had now reached the landing, and his hand was already on the latch of his own bedroom door.

"Don't be in such a hurry; I want to ask you a question. What was that you said about staying here some days? Did you mean it?"

"Mean it? Well, perhaps. I don't know."

"But I thought you were so eager to push on. I had no idea you cared so much about the fishing."

"My dear fellow," said Debenham, impatiently, "we can talk of this to-morrow. Let us go to bed now. I'm horribly tired."

"All right. I only asked because I was surprised. And you wanted to have slept at Monmouth to-night, you know. However, I don't care—not a bit. And if you've taken a fancy to the place—"

"Good-night, Archie."

"Good-night, then. But, I say—"

"What do you say?"

"Isn't Miss Alleyne a little beauty?"

Debenham shut the door in his face.

CHAPTER XII.

"FOR THE FIRST TIME."

THE next day, and the next, and yet the next went by, and still, to Archie's infinite perplexity and *ennui*, Temple Debenham lingered on at Cillingford. He liked the place; he liked the fishing; he liked the landlady; he liked the "Silver Trout;" he liked sketching with Mr. Alleyne; he liked any thing, in short, except sticking to the programme they had laid out for themselves at starting. Archie, to be sure, though he liked neither the "Silver Trout," nor the landlady, nor Mr. Alleyne, could only sigh and obey. That Debenham should do as he pleased, and that Archie should do as Debenham pleased, was inevitable. The one always led, and the other always followed. Their friendship, indeed, had been based on this hypothesis from the first, and the result, till now, had been uniformly satisfactory.

On the present occasion, however, Archie's allegiance pressed somewhat heavily upon him. They had been out only a few days; the weather was superb; the pleasure of their holiday was all to come; and yet Debenham had already called a halt, and showed no sign of moving. Nor was this all. There were strangers in the way—strangers who sketched, and talked German aesthetics—and to these people his friend devoted all his time and conversation. So Archie, who neither sketched nor talked German aesthetics, found it decidedly dull.

In the mean while, Temple Debenham had fallen irretrievably in love.

For the first time—literally for the first time. Till this moment he had cared for no woman but his mother. He had never known even a boy's passing fancy. All the bright eyes in Zollenstrasse (and they were not a few) had never cost him a single heart-beat. As for his

fellow-students, they cultivated the tender passion as they cultivated their beards and hair—that is, profusely. Full to the brim of *Kunst* and sentiment and Vater-land, they lived in a chronic state of romance, and would not have known how to live out of it. Perhaps the sight of these tender-hearted German youths prosing together about their Gretchens and Annehens, as they quaffed their *Bairische* beer, and smoked their cheap tobacco under the trees in the *Linden platz*, may have had something to do with Debenham's indifference. He saw too much of love and love-making, and, like a nurse in a fever hospital, lived in such an atmosphere of contagion that he became proof against danger. But, now that he no longer lived in that atmosphere, he was no longer safe. For him, as for other men, there was peril in "a rosie cheek or a coral lip." His turn had come at last to take that "falling sickness," yclept love; and, like all who take it late, he took it severely.

The mischief was partly done before he had ever seen her. Sitting in the porch that first night, he listened to the music of her voice till he had half listened his heart away. The tender shades of the gloaming, the dawning stars overhead, the peace and poetry of the coming night, the very novelty of the situation, all predisposed him to any new impression. He was just in that mood when a man can not help falling in love. Then her father came out, and invited them into her very presence; and he went in; and he saw her; and he found that she was as fair to see as her voice was sweet to hear; and then it was all over with him, and he was as desperately in love as any one of those poor Karls and Heinrichs whom he used to laugh at so heartlessly in the old Zollenstrasse days.

However slowly the time may have dragged by for Archie, for Debenham, at all events, the days and hours flowed past in one enchanting stream of poetry. Cillingford became his terrestrial paradise. No other air was ever so laden with perfume; no other skies were ever so blue; no other hills so golden in light, so purple in shadow. It seemed to him as if some strange and subtle spell had suddenly descended on the earth. Never had nature shown so fair; never had he, at all events, been so keenly conscious of the boundless beauty of forest and field.

As for Miss Alleyne, he contrived to be with her, or near her, all the long day. He organized walks. He taught, or pretended to teach her the art and mystery of fly-fishing. He sketched, and Mr. Alleyne corrected his perspective, and touched up his foliage. He read aloud, while the father painted at the door of his temporary tent, and the daughter, sitting close by in the shade, pursued some delft little handicraft that looked like lace-making, less the pillow and bobbins. And then he talked—ah! never before had he talked so well! Never had his memory been so reproductive, his imagination so vivid, his illustrations so happy. All his reading came suddenly to the surface, and things long forgotten were remembered like things of yesterday. It almost seemed to him as if he had never known till now how much he had thought, or how extensive his observations had been; but then, till now, he had never been in love, and love is of all stimulants the most powerful. It sharpens the wits like danger, and the memory like hatred;

it spurs the will like ambition; it exalts the imagination like *haschich*; it intoxicates like wine. A man of real power, who, loving for the first time, loves with all the force of his intellect and all the fire of his blood, feels himself capable of all things. He holds the world and its gifts in the hollow of his hand. He has but to will and to do. He is no longer a man, but a demigod.

And so it was with Temple Debenham. A new world had opened to him—a new life had descended upon him—a glory of hope and gladness was about his head. Rapt, inspired, lifted out of himself, he felt like a hero—he talked like a poet. All the genius that was in him blazed suddenly into love. The coldness, the selfishness, the hardness of his nature, seemed all at once to shrivel away, and be consumed in that Promethean fire. He longed to do something great, that he might be worthier of her affection. He would fain have been called upon to make some heavy sacrifice or undergo some poignant suffering for her sake. How easy to achieve, endure, resign any thing in her name! He was ready, in short, to undertake the impossible.

It was a condition of things that could not long remain a secret to the lookers-on. The landlady of the "Silver Trout" found it out immediately, and told it, of course, to her married sister, and her sister's husband, and the sister's husband's niece, and all her friends and acquaintances. The ruddy, red-haired, slatternly drudge called by courtesy the "chamber-maid," made the discovery for herself quite as promptly, and shared the information with every gossiping crone and giggling chit in the place. Archie, to his unutterable consternation, stumbled upon the truth in the course of the fourth day. Mr. Alleyne, however, being, like all selfish persons, extremely unobservant of matters not directly affecting his own comforts, painted and talked, sipped his port and smoked his scented Havana, in the most luxurious disregard of the little drama which was being enacted before his eyes. He either did not see it at all, or, seeing it, mistook the whole performance for a mere ordinary flirtation, "signifying nothing."

And Miss Alleyne?

Well—Miss Alleyne was a woman; and no woman, however modest or dull, was ever yet so modest or so dull as to be unconscious of the admiration of a man. Juliet Alleyne was perfectly aware from the first that Debenham admired her; but then she was used to admiration, and even a little tired of it—or tried to believe that she was so. She accepted his homage, at all events, as a matter of course, and attached no more importance to it than she had already attached to the homage of a score of others. She listened to him, however, and knew that he was worth listening to. She made entries in her diary of the books he praised and the authors he quoted. In the mornings, when she was getting up, she began to wonder where and how soon she should see him; whether he would join them over at the tent, or meet them first on the Cillingford side, or cross with them in the ferry. At night, she fell into a habit of sitting on the side of her bed and remembering the things he had talked about during the day, and how he looked when he said them. Perhaps she even began to miss him when he was absent, and to listen, involuntarily, for the sound of his voice

on the stairs, or his footstep on the gravel. But of this she was not even conscious. She liked him, of course. She would have answered frankly enough on that head, had she been questioned; but that she liked him better than she might, under similar circumstances, have liked any other chance acquaintance, was a proposition that never occurred to her for a moment.

And so she suffered the acquaintance to glide into something almost approaching to intimacy before any suspicion of love—earnest, vehement, passionate love, such as this dark-eyed stranger might be capable not only of feeling but inspiring—had even flashed across her thoughts.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHURCH AMONG THE HILLS.

WANDERING at hot noon in the scented gloom of the pine woods; climbing at sunset by steep lanes and stony foot-paths to every neighboring hill-top; following the windings of the steel-bright river in the early summer moonlight; reading Shakespeare in the shade of an antique oak that might have struck root in the forest of Arden; gathering poppies in the corn-fields, and wild strawberries in the woods; listening to the nightingale in the gloaming, and to the cuckoo's double note in the sultry silence of mid-day; talking of music, of art, of poetry, of places and people famed in song and story, of the Alps and the sweet south—of every thing, save love—these two drifted on day by day, setting their hearts to the music of the joyous present, as if life had never a past behind nor a future before it.

An enchanted time! Perhaps, take it for all in all, the very sweetest time that lovers know—when the frail barrier of silence is yet unbroken; when nothing has yet been asked, and nothing granted; when lips that have never met are tremulous with untasted kisses; when the passion that has not yet found language vibrates in the voice, and thrills the lingering palm; when nothing is certain but hope, and nothing worth hoping for but certainty; when the fair face of nature seems all at once to be divinely transfigured, and every common thing is informed with beauty, and the very air is love. An enchanted time; but, by necessity, a brief one! Love will out no less than murder; and, however sweet the suspense of silence, lovers will speak and end it. Debenham spoke and ended it before many days were past.

It happened thus:

Miss Alleyne had said that she would like to hear him play, and the landlady had told them of a little church up in a fold of the hills some three or four miles away, where there was an organ. So Debenham beat up the neighborhood for a donkey, and at about four o'clock one brilliant afternoon they started, Miss Alleyne heading the procession on donkey-back; Debenham leading the gallant animal by the rein; Mr. Alleyne and Archie bringing up the rear.

The way was steep, and led, for the most part, through young plantations, and clearings populous with rabbits. Once they passed a wood-cutter's cottage, with its bit of garden, its beehives, its hollyhocks, its yelping cur and group of wondering children at the gate. Sometimes

"ONE BRILLIANT AFTERNOON THEY STARTED, MISS ALLEYNE HEADING THE PROCESSION ON DONKEY-BACK."



they startled a covey of partridges, and once or twice heard the whir of a pheasant. But it was a wild, solitary climb, on the whole, and, till they came to a cross-road a long way up, leading to a space of furzy common where stood a cluster of some six or eight dilapidated cottages, they met not a single way-side passenger. Hence they were directed along a green road still trending upward, and so came to an old-fashioned parsonage half hidden in trees, and a tiny church so overgrown with ivy that the windows and door,

the little wooden belfry, and part of the roof, were alone visible. They found the church-yard gate unfastened; the parson's cob feeding among the graves; the church door standing wide open for all who chose to enter. So Miss Alleyne alighted, and they tied the donkey to the gate, and went in.

A quaint, quieter, sadder little church it would be impossible to conceive. The rafters, roof, the screen, the pews, panels, and pulpit, were all of black, worm-eaten oak. Old scutch-

cons and death's-head tablets crowded the walls. The altar-cloth, once red, looked like a rusty pall. The footsteps of generations had worn the pavement into deep hollows, and half trodden away a pair of monumental brasses near the altar rails. As for the windows, they were so darkened with ivy, and so overlaid with the dust of years, that it was impossible to distinguish even the color of the few patches of stained glass that yet remained in them. The organ stood in a little dusk corner against the choir, partly hidden by the screen, and partly by a faded red curtain.

"And now, my dear Sir," said Mr. Alleyne, at once doing the honors of the place as if he were lord of the manor or bishop of the diocese, "we are all impatience to hear you. Is the organ locked? If so, we must apply at the parsonage for the key."

"It is not locked," said Miss Alleyne, peeping through the curtain. "It is open—and it is the strangest little organ! The keys are all ebony, as if its very teeth were black with age; and it looks so feeble and decrepit that it seems impossible it should have any voice left."

"Here is some trace of an inscription," said the artist, adjusting his double eye-glass; "but the gilding is so worn, and the place so dark, that I can not decipher it."

Debenham, taking his seat on the organist's bench, bent down and read aloud the name of "Edward Fisher, Maker, London, 1622."

"It is nearly two hundred and fifty years old," he said, running his fingers lightly along the keys, which, there being no wind in the bellows, gave out a hollow sound like the rattling of dry bones. "Two hundred and fifty years—a long life for such a thing of pipes and valves. Why, Milton might have played upon it—Cromwell might have listened to it."

"Has it been hidden up here in these wild hills, I wonder, all that time?" said Miss Alleyne. "One would like to know its history."

"A checkered one, most likely," replied Debenham. "It has changed its religion and its politics more than once, we may be certain. Organs are sad renegades, and this one is old enough to have turned its coat a good many times. It may have been Royalist and Roundhead, Papist and Protestant—have droned Puritan psalm tunes in the days of the Protectorate, lilted secular airs to the rhymes of Sternhold and Hopkins for the merry monarch, and lent itself to Palestrina's mass-music under James II. There is nothing in the world so shamelessly inconsistent as a church organ, except a peal of bells."

"Or a woman," said Mr. Alleyne.

"That observation, *Monsieur mon père*, has not even the merit of novelty," said his daughter, saucily.

"Eternal truths never have, my love. But Mr. Debenham wants some one to blow for him."

"I'll blow," said Archie, eagerly.

"Then you must let me relieve guard when you are tired," said the artist, condescendingly.

Archie laughed and shook his head. His coat was off already.

"I'm never tired," he replied. "I'm used to it. Now, Debenham, say when."

But Debenham was not yet ready. He was examining the stops, the names on which were

almost illegible, and trying the compass of the pedals.

"Here is a stop," he said, presently, "which is seldom, if ever, made by modern builders—the Vox Humana."

"I should like to hear that," said Miss Alleyne.

"It is sure to be very bad. These Vox Humana stops are generally failures, even in the best instruments. Still, the thing has been done. There are two Vox Humana stops in the great organ at Freiburg—a soprano and tenor—the effect of which is simply indescribable."

"Do they really sound like human voices?" asked Miss Alleyne.

"They sound like superhuman voices—like the voices of angels making use of no articulate speech. Imagine an absolutely faultless voice singing without the utterance of even a vowel sound. But there! one can not imagine it. A voice *must* utter a note by means of a vowel sound, and an organ can only utter the note. This it is which gives such unearthly effect to a good Vox Humana stop."

"And this one—"

"I predict that it is a bad specimen. Now, Archie, blow!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VOX HUMANA.

ARCHIE fell upon the bellows with a will. Mr. Alleyne, having ensconced himself in the most comfortable corner of the squire's pew, closed his eyes and prepared to listen luxuriously—or, it may be, to sleep. Miss Alleyne remained in the choir, separated from the organ by only a rail and a half-drawn curtain.

"Do you mind being overlooked while you play?" she said. "Shall I go away?"

He was playing now—a few soft preliminary chords.

"Ah, no," he said, dreamily, without looking round. "Never go away. Stay here, and let me play to you always."

"Always?" she repeated with a gay little laugh.

"Ay; if one could arrest the shadow on the dial!"

"And lose the pleasure of expecting to-morrow?"

"To-morrow? There is no to-morrow for those who—"

He checked himself; drew out another stop; went on playing.

"To-morrow!" he resumed, after a moment's pause, still not looking round; still in the same low, musing tone. "To-morrow may bring doubt, or certainty worse than doubt. To-morrow may bring death, or parting worse than death. Do not speak of to-morrow; it makes a coward of me."

Miss Alleyne drew back a little into the shade of the curtain, but said nothing.

"I used to live in and for the future," he went on. "Ten days ago, I thought of nothing else. The present, with its disappointments and struggles, was a mere probation. Now the present is all in all; the future, nothing."

"You have had disappointments and strug-

gles?" said Miss Alleyne, with a touch of tremor in her voice.

"Who that is ambitious has not? They are the purchase-money of success."

He did not see the bright look that flashed across her face as he said this.

"But—but if one pays for success too dearly?" she said, hesitatingly.

"There are some things for which it is impossible to pay too dearly."

"For instance, fame?"

"No; one may pay too high a price for fame; but for happiness—"

He broke off abruptly. All this time he had not ceased playing. All this time the stream of sound kept swelling under his fingers like a gathering tide, as he added fresh stops and wandered on to richer and remoter combinations of harmony.

"It is perhaps one of our heaviest misfortunes," he began again, presently, "that we do not know when we are happy. Blind to the wealth of the present, we go on staking upon the future till we have lost all. Now, had I the power given to Joshua of old, I would bid the sun and moon stand still in the heavens forever. I would go on playing, you should go on listening—forever. The trees out yonder should never shed their leaves, the corn-fields never ripen, the shadows never lengthen on the grass."

"And papa should never have his dinner, and poor Mr. Blyth should never leave off blowing!" laughed Miss Alleyne. "I fear they would not accept immortality upon such hard conditions. But you have not yet used the *Vox Humana* stop."

"I am leading up to it," he replied. "All this is introduction. I will use it now—as a solo."

"As a solo? What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will take it alone, without the admixture of any other stops, on this upper row of keys, playing it as you will see, with the right hand, while the left hand on the row below, and the pedals, supply the accompaniment."

"Like a voice, in fact, singing to an accompaniment?"

"Exactly. And now you must imagine that it is night. Scene, a garden; the moon gleaming through broken rifts of cloud, the trees whispering prophetically as the night-wind comes and goes, the façade of an Italian palazzo all ghostly in the moonlight, a girlish figure on the balcony, a moving shadow among the cypresses below—"

"The garden scene in 'Romeo and Juliet!' Yes, Mr. Debenham, I will try to imagine all that. Having done so, what next?"

"Having done so, we will suppose this *Vox Humana* to be the voice from the garden."

"Romeo singing to Juliet."

For the first time since he had begun to play Debenham lifted his head and flashed a sudden glance at her.

"I have not said that it is Romeo," he replied.

Something in his voice, in his words, brought the warm color in a tide to Miss Alleyne's cheek and brow. Something in his glance seemed to scathe her like fire. But, even as he spoke, his master-touch evoked the first low, detached tones of the *Vox Humana*.

The stop was not a fine one—that was hardly

to be expected; but it was not, as Debenham had predicted, a very bad one. In quality it was somewhat dry and harsh; but as it belonged to the swell organ, the player had it in his power to make this defect less apparent. It was capable, at all events, of expression.

And now, warming to his subject as he went on, the young man flung his whole soul into his improvisation. It was no longer the voice of an imaginary lover in an imaginary garden. It was his own voice telling the tale of his own passion. Hesitatingly, timidly, the *Vox Humana* began, like the uncertain utterances of a love hitherto unspoken. Phrased like a recitative—interrupted by frequent pauses—now breaking off abruptly on some unresolved note, as if waiting a reply—now hurrying on, as if eagerly pleading—now passionately uplifted, now falling to a whisper, the voice part scarcely needed words to make its story plainer. Declaration, suspense, hope, fear, entreaty, were all poured forth in turn. The very soul of the player, seemed to pass into the instrument. The pipes obeyed his touch as if informed with a conscious sympathy—as if breathing the language of a living passion.

Then suddenly these speaking, striving, irregular utterances ceased. The accompaniment, no longer waiting upon the voice as in dramatic recitative, swept into a magnificent flow of chromatic passages, rising and falling, coming and going, now dying in the distance, now returning in might, like the fitful swelling of a summer wind; while clear above all, earnest, and full, and impetuous, the voice part rose in a strain of impassioned melody.

Miss Alleyne had moved away before; but now, constrained, as it were, by the spell of his "so-potent art," she drew insensibly nearer, till she found herself standing, breathless, fascinated, close behind the player. Such music as this she had never heard before. Not that it was so wonderful in point of manual skill, for Debenham was too profound a musician in the largest sense of the phrase to attach undue importance to the mechanism of his art; and, finely as he played, it would at any time have been easy to find a dozen public performers who, as mere executants, surpassed him in dexterity. But his playing was the direct interpretation of his genius. It was mind expressed in sound—every passage an inspiration—every touch an idea. Between such playing as this—the playing of a great improvisatore—and the playing of a mere performer, there is the same difference as between the speech of a farvid orator and the conventional *rechauffés* of a newspaper reporter.

Upon Archie Blyth laboring at the back of the organ in his shirt-sleeves, and upon Mr. Alleyne placidly dozing among the cushions of the squire's pew, this wealth of harmony was cast away; but not so upon the one hearer for whom alone it was created. She, at all events, listened as though she were listening to the music of the spheres.

"Have you skill to interpret this dumb singing?" he asked, presently.

"I am skilled in nothing, Mr. Debenham," she replied; "but—but I suppose no one ever played Mendelssohn's *Liedert Ohne Worte* without imagining words of some sort to the melodies."

"Then what words have you given to our Vox Humana all this time?"

Miss Alleyne hesitated.

"I do not think it is possible," she said, "to put actual words to music which one hears for the first time. One may ascribe a general meaning to the whole; but unless one knows what is coming next—unless, indeed, the music is written—"

"True; but you have ascribed a general meaning?"

"I supposed you had taken the garden scene in 'Romeo and Juliet' for your theme."

"And this voice?"

"Romeo's, of course."

"Nay, I warned you against that conclusion, Miss Alleyne."

"True; but you bade me at the same time imagine a garden and moonlight—an Italian palazzo—a lady, who could be none other than Juliet, on the balcony—"

"Ah, Miss Alleyne, take Juliet for granted, if you will!" he said, half turning in his place; his left hand still resting on the keys; his eyes looking into hers; his voice low, and hurried, and eager. "Let it be Juliet who listens; but not Romeo, not Romeo, who sings! This song, could you read it aright, would tell a tale of love as sudden, as deep, as passionate as his; but with this difference—it is a tale of first love. Romeo, remember, loved Rosaline before ever he loved Juliet; and may have loved a score of others besides. But he who made this song never gave a thought, or a hope, to any but the one Juliet whom he loved for the first and last time in his life. Nay, I beseech you do not draw away—I beseech you, hear me! What I have to say can not be new to you. You must have known that I love you. You must have seen it in my face—heard it in my voice—felt it in the very air we breathe together! I have loved you from the first moment I beheld you; I have gone on since then loving you more and more every day, every hour. Perhaps, had I been sure you could never have loved me back again, I might have overcome it at the first—I might have forced myself to fly from you and never see your face again; but now it is too late. I have not a hope, or an aim, or an end in life that does not centre in you. If I am to work now, it must be for you—if I am to excel, it must be for you—if I am to live the life and fight the fight that lay before me a week ago, it must still be for you. Kailing that motive—and a man's heart is so fearfully strong in hope that it needs a mighty effort even to think of adverse possibilities—failing that motive, Ju—Miss Alleyne, I hardly think I should be equal to any thing, or worth any thing, in the time that lies before me!"

He broke off abruptly. Miss Alleyne turned a frightened glance upon the squire's pew; but her father still slept the sleep of the just.

"I—I had not expected this," she said, falteringly.

"Does it surprise you? Is it possible you had not seen how I loved you?"

The question was inconvenient. Like a true woman, she answered it, after a moment's hesitation, by another.

"But why do you love me?"

She had a spice of the coquette in her compo-

sition—granted. But, unless she were the veriest coquette that ever lived, she could not have asked that question if she had meant to bid him despair. It was a question that authorized him to launch out into all the foolish, fond, extravagant reasons that a lover's wit could devise. Why did he love her? Why did the sun shine in the heavens by day and the stars by night? Why did the birds sing in the spring-time, and the tides obey the moon, and the kindly fruits of the earth succeed each other season after season? Was it not that all things were governed by "a law divine"—a law of order, of fitness, of beauty, of sympathy, of love? Was it not in obedience to that law that heart sought heart, and hand was outstretched for hand throughout the pilgrimage of life? And across what a desert that pilgrimage lay for those whose fate it was to perform it alone! For himself he dared not contemplate it. For himself there was nothing but Paradise or the desert. Why did he love her? Not because she was beautiful—graceful—accomplished; not because her tastes were his tastes; not because she loved art, music, books; not because chance had thrown them together in a romantic spot at the sweetest season of the year. No—for none of these reasons; but for her very self. Were she unbeautiful, ungraceful, untaught, he felt he must have loved her just the same. It was that he had found himself constrained to love her—irresistibly drawn toward her as toward a second self—and this even at the first sound of her voice, before he had so much as seen her face! Was this accident, or the result of circumstance? No—it was destiny. It was that divine law of fitness and sympathy—*et cætera, et cætera*.

In short, Temple Debenham, being not yet twenty-six years of age and very much in earnest, talked a vast deal of eloquent nonsense, to all of which Miss Alleyne listened with a beating heart and a changing color. Had she disliked the speaker, or read all these pretty things in a second-rate novel, or overheard them addressed to another, she would have been ready enough to criticise them; but what woman ever yet detected faults of style in the declaration of the lover she really cared for? As for Debenham, he would have been less fluent had he been less hopeful. Miss Alleyne's one little question as to why he loved her had buoyed him up to the seventh heaven at once.

Having talked himself out of breath, he came by-and-by to a pause.

"You have asked me," he said, looking longingly at her hand, which was resting on the curtain rail, but not daring to touch it, "why I love you, and I have tried to tell you. Perhaps my best and shortest answer, after all, would be to say that I love you because I can not help it. Will you tell me in return if there is any reason why I should not love you?"

"I—I don't know," she answered, with the faintest fitting of a smile about her mouth. "I should think there were a good many reasons."

"Do you dislike me?"

"N—no."

"Do you love any one else?"

"Yes. I love that excellent man asleep in yonder pew."

"Ah, do not trifle with me, Miss Alleyne!

You know what I mean, and—you must have had so many lovers!"

"A flattering supposition. Many thanks."

"This is cruel! You jest with me, knowing how desperately I am in earnest."

"But what do you want?"

"One word of hope."

"It is the first time you have even asked for it!"

"Good heavens! what have I been doing for the last half hour?"

"Let me see— Well, you have been telling me, in the first place, how much you love me; and, in the second place, why you love me; and, in the third place, you wanted to know if there were any reasons why you should not love me. Now I think there are several."

Her hand was still resting on the curtain rail, and he was still looking at it. Timidly, as if it were a sacred thing, he stooped and touched it with his lips. She blushed, and withdrew it.

"Name them," he said, gently.

"You do not know me."

"I think I do."

"Indeed, you do not. I am neither so good, nor so clever, nor so—so pretty, as you seem to fancy. And you know nothing of how I have been brought up, nor of my surroundings, nor of my disposition. I repeat it—you don't know me."

"I beg leave to hold my own opinion on that point. What else?"

"Well, I don't know you."

"You know more of me in some respects than my own mother knows of me; and I think I have told you all my story, such as it is. However, the question is not whether you know me, but— but whether you can love me."

Miss Alleyne's hand had by this time returned, somehow or another, to the curtain rail. He kissed it again, imprisoned it fast within his own, laid his cheek against it, felt it tremble, struggle for a moment to be free, and then yield itself passively into captivity.

"I know I am not worthy of you," he said, tenderly; "but I love you, and I will work for you, and some day you shall be proud of me."

"I am proud of you already," she whispered.

His arm was round her waist now; but he was still sitting, she still standing, the envious curtain rail still between them. He drew her nearer, but still not near enough. He laid his head back against the curtain rail, but also against her bosom; for she was half bending over it. He looked up into her face with those dark, deep, passionate eyes that were his only personal beauty.

"If it is true," he said; "if it is not all a dream—kiss me."

But she averted her face, and held back silently.

"I have never been kissed in my life," he said, simply, "except by my mother."

Her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"My mother died without having kissed me—without having seen me," she faltered.

"Poor child!"

"You are sorry?"

"Yes; because you have lost so much. I love you; but what of that? It is but a man's love, after all; whereas a mother's— Well, the human being whose childhood has been blessed

with the love of a good and tender mother gets his heaven at both ends of life, instead of at the latter end only."

"How good Mrs. Debenham must be, for you to say that!" exclaimed Miss Alleyne.

The young man bent his head as reverently as a devotee who hears the name of his patron saint.

"My mother," he said, "is an angel."

"Do you think that—that she will like me?" said Miss Alleyne, shyly, but with a gleam of coquetry.

"She will adore you!"

"But I am not an angel, you know."

"*Dieu merci!* What hope would there be for me if you were? I should never get that kiss, for instance—"

"Hush! My father is waking."

"No; he has only moved his head. But he will wake presently; I must go on playing. See, I can not get up—I can not take you in my arms. Be generous, and give me what I think you would not refuse if I were free to take it."

"For your mother's sake, then," she whispered; and, blushing crimson, bent forward and touched his forehead lightly with her lips.

At that instant Mr. Alleyne sneezed and woke. He sat up, looked round him, and, remembering where he was and all about it, patted his hands softly together in decorous applause.

"Thanks, Mr. Debenham," he said, graciously, "many thanks. A very charming performance indeed. Quite a treat—quite a treat. I have enjoyed it immensely."

"The music, papa, or the nap?" asked his daughter, laughingly.

"My love, I have not been asleep."

"Oh, *padre mio!*"

"Not for a moment—not for a moment, I assure you. I have not lost a single note."

Debenham, to conclude with, played Mendelssohn's immortal Wedding March.

CHAPTER XV.

ARCHIE DISAPPROVES.

THE lovers went back to Cillingford by the direct road to Paradise, and spent the evening in a delicious dream, talking but little, drinking enchanted tea out of enchanted cups, and looking out oftener than was strictly necessary at the moon. Later in the evening Mr. Alleyne proposed the now habitual rubber, in the course of which Temple Debenham repeatedly trumped his partner's best card, and Miss Alleyne invariably forgot to follow suit.

After they had all bidden good-night and gone up to bed, Debenham called Archie into his room and invited him to sit down.

"There is the bed," he said, "and there is the chair. The chair, however, has only three legs—I recommend the bed."

Archie perched himself upon the side of the bed, and stared at his friend in ominous silence. Debenham was evidently embarrassed, and Archie was not disposed to help him out of his embarrassment. A solemn pause ensued; Debenham walking excitedly backward and forward in his shirt-sleeves and slippers; Archie swinging his legs to and fro, and waiting to be spoken



to. All at once Debenham plunged his hand into his knapsack and brought out his cigar-case.

"Have a weed, Archie?" he exclaimed, in a burst of hospitality.

But Archie was not to be thawed. He took the cigar with a nod, put it unlighted between his lips, and sat gloomily sucking it.

"I have something to tell you, old man," said the other, presently.

Archie removed the cigar, grunted, put it back again, and still answered not a word.

"There—I may as well tell it in half a dozen words as a thousand. I love her, Archie, and she loves me. It's all right, and I'm the happiest fellow in the world. Congratulate me."

He put out his hand as he said this, so that Archie could do no less than shake it; but he pursed up his mouth, and, as it were, performed that ceremony under protest.

"I don't see that it's all right at all," he said, gloomily. "I should be more inclined to say it was all wrong. It'll be the ruin of you."

"The ruin of me! What, in Heaven's name, do you mean?"

"I mean that it's all nonsense, and worse than nonsense. A man with your genius—why, you'll be making love when you ought to be making money. Such an engagement as that will weigh like a millstone round your neck."

"Nothing of the kind. It will inspire me to do greater things than ever."

Archie shook his head.

"It gives me something to work for."

"You had fame to work for—fame and fortune."

"Well, now I shall have fame, fortune, and a wife to work for."

"A wife! Why, you've only known her a week. What are you to live upon?"

"I haven't the slightest idea—counterpoint and kisses."

Archie shrugged his shoulders dolefully.

"Oh dear, dear!" said he, "if you had only

had a business education! If you had only been brought up in the City! What will Mr. Alleyne say?"

"Can't imagine."

"And Mrs. Debenham?"

"My mother will be utterly happy to have such a daughter. They will adore each other."

Archie groaned aloud.

"I'd bet any sum you pleased," said he, "that she hasn't a farthing. The old man spends every thing on himself."

"And is welcome to do so for me," exclaimed the lover. "Do you think I want money with the woman I love? Not I! I'd rather have Juliet Alleyne without a farthing, as you call it, than with twenty thousand pounds for her fortune."

Archie got up and turned toward the door.

"You are mad," he said, "stark, staring, raving mad. But there!—it's no business of mine. I will say no more. I am only making myself disagreeable."

"Confoundedly disagreeable, old fellow; and for nothing. I thought you'd be delighted."

"How can I be delighted? I'm disappointed—awfully disappointed. I'm not clever. I don't pretend to be clever; but I know what genius is when I see it. I thought you were going to be a great man. I had set my heart on it. I thought you'd write something wonderful in the way of music; or do something wonderful; for it seems to me there's nothing you could not do, if you liked. And then I thought you'd be famous, and marry a girl with lots of money—Claudia Hardwicke, perhaps; and then—"

Debenham burst into a hearty laugh.

"Marry Claudia Hardwicke!" he repeated.

"Why, I'd as soon marry Lady Macbeth or the Minerva Medica. No, thank you, Archie; I won't trouble you to choose a wife for me. I think I can please myself best in that matter. Nay, don't look so grave. Wish me joy, at least, before you go."

"Oh, I wish you joy—of course, I wish you joy," replied Archie, his hand upon the door.

"I'm afraid it has been a little dull for you these last few days, dear old fellow."

Archie made a sort of grimace.

"Well, it—it hasn't been amusing," said he.

"You've thrown me over, you know, altogether. The tour is at an end, I suppose, as far as you are concerned?"

"Indeed, I do not say that. I certainly shall not let you go on alone."

"Ah, that means that you would like to stay on here forever, playing at Corydon and Phillis, with me for audience."

"No—it means that I want neither to part from you nor from her. Mr. Alleyne's picture will be finished in another week or ten days, and then he will go back to London. If we stay on till then, we shall still have three weeks left."

"Bother Mr. Alleyne's picture!" said Archie, pettishly. "Be hanged if I'll wait for it. Good-night."

And with this he went out, and banged the door.

Poor Archie! It was very rude, of course. Of all known evidences of temper there is, perhaps, not one more futile, more ridiculous, more vulgar than door-banging. But it is very natu-

ral; and, no doubt, very comforting. Besides, it was a case of real provocation. Archie's was, at all events, a loving nature—honest, forbearing, faithful as a dog's; and Debenham had, verily and indeed, "thrown him over" for a pretty face of a week's standing. Large allowances should be made for the aberrations of jealousy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRYST BY THE RIVER.

WHAT will Mr. Alleyne say?

It was a question that had flitted across Debenham's mind before ever Archibald Blyth translated it into downright, commonplace English. And it was a very unpleasant question—a question open to a variety of disagreeable answers, and suggestive of all kinds of inconvenient possibilities. That Mr. Alleyne would inquire of him concerning his means and prospects was certain. That unless Mr. Alleyne took an exceedingly elevated and artistic view of the matter he would be highly dissatisfied with the result of those inquiries was no less certain. But, then, was Mr. Alleyne likely to take that elevated and artistic view? He was an artist. He abounded in lofty sentiments. He was fond of talking of himself as a servant of the Ideal, a high-priest of the Beautiful, and all that sort of thing. But, on the other hand, he was particular about his dinners, curious in his wines, extravagant in the matter of cigars, olives, liqueurs, and all such personal luxuries. Was it not, then, gravely to be feared that, *beau parleur* though he was, Mr. Alleyne might in the present instance incline toward that prosaic view of love and matrimony which is formed upon the oracular columns of Lett's "House-keeper," rather than toward that ideal standard which measures all such matters by the law of pure sentiment, and is founded on a recognition of the eternal fitness of things?

Oppressed by these misgivings, the lover could not refrain from expressing something of his apprehension to Miss Alleyne when they met next morning, not wholly by accident, up at the weir, a good hour before the high-priest of the Beautiful was up and stirring.

"You see, my own Juliet," he said, caressing the little hand that rested confidently upon his arm, "I have no money."

"None at all?"

"None at all—except what I earn."

"But that is our own case! Papa has only what he earns."

"But I earn so little! Mr. Alleyne has an established reputation—an aristocratic connection—commissions in plenty. Mr. Alleyne, I doubt not, can sell whatever he paints."

"He could sell ten times more than he paints," replied Miss Alleyne. "The difficulty is to get him to work."

"Whereas I work nineteen hours out of the twenty-four, and can neither get my compositions performed nor published—much less paid for."

"Then how—"

She checked herself, and blushed; but he finished the sentence for her.

"How do I live? Well, I give lessons; I

play the organ at a little church in the City; I—in short, I barely earn enough to pay for the food I eat and the coat on my back."

"But you support your mother?"

"No. My mother has a small annuity—a salvage from the wreck of my father's fortune. He had been rich once, I believe; but was already a ruined man when they married. She has always been poor; but she is a millionaire compared with myself."

Miss Alleyne pointed to a felled trunk a few yards distant.

"Let us sit down there," she said, "and talk it over."

So they sat down, his arm about her waist, her head half resting against his shoulder; and for a few moments they were silent—silent and very happy.

"What folly it seems to talk of any thing but love!" said Debenham presently. "Listen to the birds—they vex their little throats with no questions of ways and means. They build their nests on the first branch they fancy, and leave all the rest to Providence. How divinely that thrush is singing! The fellow is as happy this morning as ourselves."

"It must be very pleasant to live in a tree," said Juliet. "I should like it so much. How delicious to go to sleep at night to the rustling of the leaves, and wake to the first glow of sunrise!"

"Ay, and how economical! No rent to pay, no taxes, no servants, no appearances to keep up! Shall we try it? Fancy how the address would look upon our wedding cards: 'Mr. and Mrs. Temple Debenham, at home, Broad Walk, Kensington Gardens, second elm to the right, fourth branch. *Nota Bene.*—The nest being somewhat high up, visitors are requested to provide themselves with wings.'"

"What nonsense!"

"Nay, for a couple with no money—"

"I do not really see that it matters in the least whether we have money or not," interrupted Miss Alleyne, tracing figures of eight in the dust with the end of her parasol, and assuming an immensely practical air. "It is not as if we cared about getting married—"

"I beg your pardon. I care about getting married!"

Miss Alleyne shook her pretty head, and went on as if he had not spoken.

"It is not, I repeat, as if we cared about getting married. It is enough for us that we love each other, and are happy. We are both young; and if we were to wait for fifteen or twenty years—"

"My darling! The age of man is but three-score years and ten," remonstrated Debenham. "You forgot that we are not living before the deluge."

"Well, supposing, then, that we waited ten or fifteen years—"

"I decline to listen to any proposition founded on such monstrous premises!"

"You can not decline, Signore. It is a form of high treason. It is your duty to give heed to the voice of your charmer, charm she never so wisely or never so unwisely—to obey her in all things reasonable and unreasonable—to see with her eyes, hear with her ears, speak with her tongue; and, above all, never to interrupt her."

"Thy slave hears, O Queen!"

"You see, Temple" (how deliciously she pronounced his name, hesitating at it a little, and then hurrying over it, like a shy young colt at a five-barred gate! He longed to take her in his arms and kiss her every time she did it)—"I know papa thoroughly, and I am about to give you valuable advice; but instead of listening to me as if I was an oracle—which I am—you interrupt me at every other word."

"I admit the infallibility of the oracle. I am all submission."

"Then begin by believing that I know papa better than any one knows him—better than he knows himself. I know all his little ways, all his little weaknesses, all his prejudices. He loves me, of course; but apart from his love, he is utterly dependent on me. I regulate his expenditure; I keep notes of his engagements; I answer his letters; I invent his dinners; I keep him up to his work. In short, I supply the clock-work, without which his existence could not go on. It is therefore impossible that I should ever leave him."

Debenham began to look grave.

"And if—if ever we are rich enough to marry during his lifetime, it can only be on condition that we live as one family, and that I am never one bit less devoted to him than I am now."

Debenham looked graver still.

"What you have to do, therefore," said Miss

Alleyne, with the most delightful air of decision, "is to tell him first of all that we don't want to marry for years and years to come—till you are quite rich and famous, you know; and then to promise that you will never dream of taking me away from him."

"But that is a very important promise, my dear Juliet," said the young man, seriously.

"To him; yes."

"To all of us. So important that very few men, I think, would like to give it."

"If you were a prince of the blood, and offered to settle thousands a year on him," she replied, "papa would never give his consent on any other terms."

"But if I once gave that promise—"

"Then I don't think papa would mind your being poor—not in the least. In fact, he would prefer it; because I should remain unmarried all the longer."

"That was not what I meant. I was about to say that if once I gave that promise, I should feel sacredly bound to keep it—and it might prove impracticable."

"How is that possible?"

He might have said, because Mr. Alleyne was utterly selfish, and that selfish people were difficult to live with; or again, he might have said, because such duties and such devotion as Mr. Alleyne was in the habit of exacting from his daughter would be incompatible with the per-



"HE STOOD LOOKING AFTER HER TILL THE LAST FLUTTER OF HER DRESS HAD VANISHED BEHIND THE WILLOWS."

formance of her duties as a wife. But he would not be so ungracious. He only sighed, and said:

"We are all human; we all have our tempers and jealousies. These schemes, I know, seldom answer, and generally end in mutual disagreement."

"But we would resolve to let nothing of that sort creep in. It depends on ourselves, you know, after all; and as for papa, why he is the most courteous and charming person in the world, if only he is allowed to have his own way."

"But when that is every one's case?"

"It is not every one's case. It is not mine; and I'm sure it is not yours."

"Then there is my mother."

"She shall live with us too, of course; and then we shall be always four to make up the evening rubber. Why, it will be perfect paradise! And oh, Temple—"

"Well, my darling?"

"Suppose they fell in love too?"

"What do you mean? Who?"

"Mrs. Debenham and papa! There, I prophesy it—the oracle prophesies it! They will fall in love with each other, and be married too, and we shall be the happiest household in the whole world!"

The air rang again with her joyous laughter; but Debenham forced a grave smile, and made no reply.

Miss Alleyne looked at her watch.

"Oh dear!" she said, "it is breakfast-time. Who would believe that we had been here an hour?"

"If you told me we had been here three hours, I should not be surprised," said Debenham.

"Indeed! Does the time seem so long?"

"Ah, you have never read a poem of Longfellow's called 'The Monk Felix.'"

"Yes, I have. The Monk Felix went out for a walk, and stopped to listen to the singing of a bird; and when he came back to his convent all the monks were changed, and he found he had been gone a hundred years."

"Ah, but the bird sang of heavenly things, so that the monk fell into a miraculous ecstasy, and the hundred years went by like a few minutes. Now my case, you see, is even stronger. I have not merely heard of the joys of a paradise—I have been in paradise. Tell me that I have been here with you three days—three weeks—three months—and I will believe it immediately."

"A very pretty compliment," laughed Miss Alleyne; "but a trifle too elaborate. But indeed I must not linger here another moment."

"Yes, one moment. I shall go into Monmouth to-day, to see if I can find a ring for this dear little finger. How I wish I had any thing by which to measure the size of it!"

"No, no—I never wear rings."

"The more reason why you should wear mine. I must label you 'sold,' you know, as they label the pictures in the exhibition. I suppose I had better not walk back with you to the house?"

"Oh no—not for the world. Papa will be dreadfully cross, too, when he comes down and finds no coffee ready."

"Like the rest of the world, Mr. Alleyne's most benevolent time, of course, is after dinner."

"I think it is—but pray, pray let me go now. You will see me again, you know, in an hour."

"Ah, it is hard to let you go, even for an hour!"

And he held her, and kissed her again and again, and when she broke from him, half angry, half laughing, stood looking after her till the last flutter of her dress had vanished behind the willows.

And then he sighed, and gnawed his mustache, and remained there for a long time, thinking. His thoughts, however, seemed scarcely to be the thoughts of a happy lover. He looked perplexed and anxious, and by-and-by began throwing stones into the river in a dreary, abstracted way, as if hardly conscious of what he was doing.

"Well, I needn't speak to him to-day, any how," he muttered, presently. "To-morrow will do, after dinner."

And then, shaking off his reverie, he turned, with long, swift strides, toward the village.

To-morrow—ah, who can foresee to-morrow!

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT DEBENHAM FOUND AT THE POST-OFFICE.

Love is an expensive luxury, as all lovers can testify. The poorest clown must find a piece or two wherewith to buy ribbons for Mopsa when Autolycus comes by with his pack; and so, in like manner, Temple Debenham, than whom few lovers could wall be poorer, trudged into Monmouth that very afternoon, and bartered away a bright new sovereign for a ring to place on Miss Alleyne's finger. It was a poor little ring enough—a mere wire of twisted gold, surmounted by a tiny heart set with one small turquoise, and containing a place for hair. But Temple's sovereigns were very few in number, and, slight as the gift was, he could afford no better. He gave the jeweler a bit of his hair to put in the little heart, and then, having Archie with him for company, took a stroll round Monmouth while it was being done.

Conscientious sight-seers both, they contrived within the next hour and a half to explore the quaint old town from end to end, seeing the market-place, the castle-walls within which Harry V. was born, the ancient gate upon the Monnow Bridge, and the beautiful old Priory window in which, say the traditions of the place, Geoffrey the Chronicler loved to sit and write.

By the time, however, that the sight-seeing was achieved and the ring ready, it was nearly five o'clock. The afternoon was hot, the way long, the road dusty, and Archie proposed that they should take a boat back to Cillingford. While he ran down to the Wye Bridge to chaffer with the boatmen, Debenham, strolling leisurely after him, caught sight of the post-office at the corner of a neighboring street. He hesitated—passed on—stopped—turned back.

It seemed unlikely that there should be any letters waiting; and yet it was possible. For himself, he had heard from his mother quite regularly since leaving home, and he had no other

correspondent. He had also kept her informed of his address. Still, both he and Archie were to have been at Monmouth a week ago, and Archie being a man of business, it was just possible—At all events he could not do wrong to inquire.

So he went into the post-office, and asked if there were any letters for Mr. Archibald Blyth. The postmistress, a rather pretty young woman in ringlets and a scarlet Garibaldi, dipped into a row of pigeon-holes at the back of her desk, and pronounced that there were no letters for Mr. Archibald Blyth.

"Nor for Mr. Temple Debenham?"

She fluttered about the pigeon-holes again, shook her ringlets triumphantly, and produced an envelope sealed with black wax. There was a letter—one letter—for Mr. Temple Debenham.

He recognized the seal, shape, and general aspect of the letter before even seeing the handwriting. It was from his mother.

He turned it over. He examined the post-mark. It bore date of more than a week ago.

Now it happened that he had received a letter from Mrs. Debenham that very morning, and one almost every morning since he had been at Cillingford; but in none of these had she made allusion to this missive, lying, "to be called for," at the Monmouth post-office. Concluding, therefore, that it had been dispatched before he had announced his intention of putting up at the "Silver Trout" till further notice, and also concluding that its contents must by this time be tolerably stale, he thrust the letter into his breast-pocket, and ran on to the Wye Bridge to see what Archie was after. He found that cheerful and indefatigable henchman sitting on the parapet, whistling a lively air, and contemplating the labors of a boatman who, having piloted his boat to the foot of the stairs, was busily wiping down the seats, spreading his bit of carpet, and making ready for the journey.

"Behold our 'trim-built wherry,'" he said, as Debenham came up, breathless from running. "Charon asked five bob. Thy Pylades offered him three. The bargain is struck for three-and-six. Don't look grave. Even to walk costs something, you know; and in this world nothing can be done for nothing. See, I've bought some buns, a tin flute, and a number of the *Family Herald*—the buns for our fleshly sustenance; the *Family Herald* for the improvement of our minds and manners; the tin flute that we may have 'music on the waters,' going along. You can serenade the fair Juliet on it to-night, if you like. So romantic; cost one penny. Hi, boatman! are you ready?"

The boatman touched his cap and sung out, "Ay, ay, Sir," in true nautical fashion. So they went down, took their seats, pushed off, and in another moment were gliding along as fast as a capital pair of oars, aided by the force of the current, could carry them.

Then Debenham bethought him of his letter. He had no sooner taken it from the envelope, however, than he was struck by something unusual in the appearance of it. It was a very long letter, to begin with. It was written upon Bath post letter-paper. The writing, too, was smaller and closer than Mrs. Debenham's ordinary hand, and covered rather more than three pages. Finally, the whole document, in its reg-

ularity and clearness, looked like a careful transcript rather than a news letter, thrown off, as Mrs. Debenham's letters were habitually thrown off, *currente calamo*.

Marveling somewhat at these things, and moved by a vague and sudden sense of apprehension, the young man began to read. At about the third or fourth line he paused, looked back to the date, and referred to the post-mark on the envelope. Then he began afresh from the beginning, and read about half the first page. And then, with a look not so much of trouble as of surprise and perplexity, he stopped again, darted an impatient glance at Archie, who was shrilling negro melodies on the tin flute with all his might, folded the letter up without attempting to read further, thrust it hastily into his pocket, and leaned back, earnestly thinking.

"No bad news, I hope?" said Archie, stopping short in the midst of a flourish.

Debenham shook his head.

"No," he said. "No news at all—at least, nothing that can be called news."

Archie looked up inquiringly.

"But don't ask me any thing about it, dear old fellow," continued Debenham, hastily. "I really don't know what the letter is about myself yet—by-gone family matters, so far as I can see. There, we won't talk of it, please."

And so the matter dropped.

The Alleynees had just sat down to dinner when they got back to Cillingford; but later, when Temple and Archie had dispatched their own frugal meal and made such change of dress as their limited resources would permit, Mr. Alleyne came out to smoke his usual post-prandial cigar, and found them in the porch. Then followed the now habitual invitation to tea and a rubber; and then Mr. Alleyne and Archie strolled up and down outside, while Debenham talked to Juliet through the parlor-window.

"You look," he said, "like a portrait in a frame of honey-suckle; or, rather, like one of those pieces by two masters, where one painted the head and the other surrounded it with a garland of flowers."

"I hope I am a good likeness," laughed Miss Alleyne.

"The best ever seen—of an angel," said the lover, passionately.

And then he brought out his little ring, tried it upon her finger, and besought her to wear it for his sake.

"Think that it is my heart," he said, showing her the little device, "and try not to break it."

"Your heart has a hinge to it!"

"Yes—see, it opens."

"And this is your hair?"

"This is my hair."

"Nay, then, you can not be enshrined in your own heart. It must be in my heart, if you are in it."

Mr. Alleyne's back being turned for the moment, Debenham seized her hand and covered it with kisses.

"That is the dearest thing you have ever said to me yet!" he exclaimed. "Am I really enshrined in your heart? Is it my home, my shelter, my kingdom forever?"

"Be sober, please, or I will immediately unsay it," retorted Miss Alleyne, drawing back from the window.

"HE BROUGHT OUT HIS LITTLE RING, THIED IT UPON HER FINGER, AND BROUGHT HER TO WEAR IT FOR HIS SAKE."



"Could you be so cruel?"

"You have no idea how cruel I can be. I am the perversest creature living."

"If I were only sure that you love me as much as I love you, you might torment me to your heart's content!"

"I think, my darling," said Mr. Alleyne, coming back to the window, "you had better ring for tea."

So Miss Alleyne rang for tea, and the gentlemen went in, and all love-whispering was over

for that evening. She wore his ring, however; and she was his partner at cards; and her hand lingered in his at parting.

"I shall go out again presently," he murmured. "Bid me good-night from your window."

And she gave him a smile which was a promise.

He then went up to his room, as if for the night, and bolted himself in. He would not go out again at once, for two reasons—the first being that he did not care to have Archie's com-

pany under Miss Alleyne's window; and the second, that he had all this time been waiting for a quiet opportunity to read his mother's letter. So now he sat down on the side of his bed, took the candle in one hand and the letter in the other, and disposed himself to a careful perusal of its contents.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. DEBENHAM'S LETTER.

THE letter, it has already been observed, was long and closely written. Seeing once more how long and how close it was, Debenham was again conscious of that same vague sense of apprehension which he had felt on first opening it. He told himself, however, that presentiments were all folly, and that his mother could not possibly have any thing to write to him which he should not rejoice to read; and so he began.

This was what he read:

"CUMBERLAND TERRACE, CAMDEN-SQUARE,
August 4, 1860.

"MY DEAR SON,—I intend this letter to be received by you when you reach Monmouth, and I therefore send it on to await you at the post-office, knowing that you will find it there sooner or later.

"You will be surprised when I tell you that at Monmouth you are within a dozen miles of the spot where your beloved father lies buried. You know that he died in North Wales; but you do not know that he was a native of Benhampton, in Monmouthshire, and that he was laid, by his own wish, in the vaults of Benhampton Church, the burial-place of his family for many generations. I never saw the place before that day, when, at the close of a long and mournful journey, I there parted from all that yet remained to me of my precious friend and companion; and I have never seen it since. You, however, ought to see it; and you ought to know more of your family history than I have yet had courage to tell you. It has ever been a painful subject to me; but that has not been my only reason for avoiding it. I have shrunk from it on your account, my own boy, even more than upon my own. Your life, up to this time at least, has been embittered by no regrets. You have been obscure, and industrious, and happy; and you have been honorably ambitious of success in the profession of your own choice. What unhappiness for me, if any thing I had to say to you should disturb that peace, and make you dissatisfied with your present condition!

"A chance determination, however, has taken you almost to the very spot where your family history may be said to begin and end; and it is now my plain duty to tell you in what way you are connected with that spot, and to give you the opportunity of seeing the birth-place and burial-place of your father and his people.

"Your father wrote his name De Benham, as all the De Benhams wrote it before him. The first De Benham of whom any definite record remains is one Geoffrey William, to whom King Edward the First devised a grant of lands in Monmouthshire in the year 1273. This Geoffrey William is supposed to have built the most ancient fragment of the present ruin. At all

events, he founded the family and gave his name to the place. You will find a village called Benhampton, and a parish and parish church of the same name; and even, I believe, a small stream which the villagers call the Benham River. Six centuries of De Benhams lie buried in the vaults of Benhampton church. The walls are lined with their monuments—the aisle is paved with their brasses. Your father lies under the north window, to the left as you face the altar, a little below the chancel; a plain stone slab, engraved only with his name and the dates of his birth and death, is let into the wall close by. His wife was too poor to erect a better monument; his son must some day undertake the office.

"My own boy, you will not let the sight of these things trouble your contentment. The De Benhams, as a family, are no more. All that was once theirs has passed into the hands of strangers, and their very name is by this time almost forgotten. You are the last of the stock, and all that remains to you of what was once a large inheritance are the vaults in which your ancestors sleep. You will make up your mind to these facts, my son—you will not give way to useless regrets. You have always been poor, and you have always been happy; and this knowledge leaves you no poorer, and ought not to leave you less happy. Instead of repining over what was lost before you were born, you should rejoice to know that you represent a noble and ancient family. Such knowledge is wealth in itself, and ought to inspire you with fresh courage to fight what you have so often called the battle of life; and, after all, their ancient name and unstained honor were the De Benhams' best possessions, and these you still inherit. For my own part, I am prouder that my son should be heir to their virtues than to all the lands and privileges that have melted away.

"These lands and privileges, however, had been melting for many generations before your father's time. Much was confiscated, I believe, during the Commonwealth; and much more was squandered by those De Benhams who lived under the four Georges. One after another, they mortgaged, sold, and mutilated their estates; so that when your grandfather died, leaving your father an orphan of eleven years of age, only a remnant of the property remained. This remnant being vested in the hands of a conscientious guardian, was carefully nursed for him during his minority. He went to Eton and Oxford, and was intended for the army. He had good abilities, without being particularly clever, and he was good-natured to a fault. Like many very good-natured people, he was somewhat inclined to indolence and disinclined to study; and was as generous, unsuspecting, and credulous as a child. Nature seems to design such men for victims. The needy and dishonest scent them, as it were, by instinct, and prey upon them without pity. It was your father's heavy misfortune to fall in the way of one of these social vultures during his third year at the university, and the vultures devoured him. I shall not attempt to do more than outline the story of his ruin.

"The young man's name, I think, was Wyn-yatt; he was only eighteen years of age, and your father was turned twenty-one. But the younger was the elder in all worldly things. He came of a bad stock. His father, I have heard, was a

disreputable, dissipated man, involved in turf transactions; married to an Italian opera-singer of doubtful reputation; and discountenanced by his family. The son at eighteen was *blasé*, vicious, and unscrupulous; he obtained a fatal ascendancy over your father's mind; led him into wild and reckless courses; plunged him into debt; induced him to put his name to all kinds of papers—in a word, ruined him!

"And never was ruin more swift and thorough. There was so little to lose, and it was so quickly gone! Your father was hurled in a few weeks from competency to beggary. He left college without having taken his degree, fled to the Continent, and left his guardian and creditors to deal with the estate as they pleased. In the mean while, the elder Wynyatt refused to pay one penny of the bills which his son had led your father to accept. Young Wynyatt was a minor, and irresponsible; your father was of age, and legally liable for the whole. Then the last acre of the De Benham lands was brought to the hammer, and your father's fortunes were wrecked at once and forever.

"A miserable pittance of something less than fifty pounds a year having been rescued for him by the strenuous efforts of guardians and lawyers, he continued to live abroad, and hid himself for more than a year in some obscure town on the borders of the Italian Tyrol. Interest was then made for him at Vienna, and he obtained a commission in the Austrian service. This he continued to hold, as you know, till about a year before his death, when his health finally broke, and we came back to England. We had then been married some nine years; and you, our only child, were just eight. The youngest daughter of a needy English chaplain in a foreign capital, I had been used to poverty all my life, as you have been, my son; and I could not understand why your father was not as happy and contented as myself. But his life was one long regret. He could not endure privation; he could not reconcile himself to the loss of his position in society; he could not bear to see his wife and child poorly dressed and lodged, and living in obscurity. You remember how sad your dear father used to be, Temple, and how he would sit for hours by the open window, silent and brooding, with his head resting on his hand. You remember the journey to England, and the summer we spent all that time when he was so ill among the mountains in North Wales. And I think you remember the mournful place where, when the last leaves fell, he died.

"This is a long letter, my son, and yet it leaves much unsaid that I had meant to say. But I feel that no letter, however long, and no details, however circumstantial, would tell you as much of the past as you would learn at Benhampton in the course of a single morning. Write to me after you have been there. I think I know you well enough to be certain that, when once you have received this letter, you will not rest till you have made the journey.

"Your loving mother,
"ADELAIDE MARY DE BENHAM."

With some pauses and some turning back, the young man read this letter through from the beginning to the end; and then he sat for a long

time on the side of his bed, still with the candle in one hand and the letter in the other, lost in meditation. And then he read it all through again.

It was a long letter, a very long letter—simple, and earnest, and straightforward, as became the occasion, and written, as has been already observed, with almost documentary precision. Debenham felt, as he read it, that every word in it had been weighed. He also thought that he could trace in almost every sentence a studied repression of feeling, and even a tone of reserve, that extended to the statement of facts. The oftener he read certain passages the more this impression gained upon him. It was a very vague impression. He could not by any means have put it into words; but he had an indefinable instinct of something yet to come.

For, after all, the letter told him very little that was new. He had always known that he had gentle blood in his veins, and that his father's circumstances had once upon a time been less terribly straitened. That the De Benhams should date back to so remote a period as six hundred years, and that the family name should be so divided as to carry the aristocratic Norman prefix, were facts pleasant enough in themselves, but not so very surprising when one came to look into them. And then, if designed only to tell him these things, and to enable him to pay a pious visit to his father's grave, was not the letter needlessly elaborate?

Pondering thus, he still fancied, and could not help fancying, that there was something which his mother had left untold; something that was not mere omission of detail; something important, which it concerned him to know, but which she, for some reason which he could not conjecture, had hesitated to tell him.

And what was the nature of this something left untold? He could not guess. Nay, he was almost afraid to guess, dreading some painful truth of which he would fain be left in ignorance. But he would learn it at Benhampton—that much was certain. Be it good news or evil news, he would learn it at Benhampton.

And then he resolved that he would go there to-morrow.

His candle had all this time been burning lower and lower, and the moon had slowly set behind the hills, and the sweet summer night was waning in the heavens. But he noticed neither the candle, nor the moon, nor the summer night, so absorbed was he in his thoughts and in his letter. Then, in the midst of the silence, the clock in the inn kitchen struck one.

He sprang to his feet with an exclamation of dismay. It was not possible that it should be one o'clock already! He looked at his watch, and the watch confirmed the fact. He could not believe it. He could not believe that, having come up stairs at half past ten, two hours and a half had slipped away so quickly. And Miss Alleyne—Miss Alleyne, who was to have come to her window to bid him good-night when the rest were gone to bed. Good heavens! he had forgotten all about her.

What should he say to her—what could he say to her in the morning? How was it possible that he should confess to the lady of his love that he had forgotten all about her?



CHAPTER XIX.

DENHAMPTON.

"HALLO there! Is this the way to Benhampton?"

The rustic thus hailed halted with his hand on the gate, grounded his scythe, and looked round. Seeing only a dusty and somewhat shabby-looking wayfarer in the road below, he shouldered his scythe again, and, boor-like, answered with a question:

"Maybe you're bound for Farmer Bowstead's?"

"No."

"Then maybe you're going up to parson's?"

"I'm going to Benhampton, if I can find the way," retorted the stranger, impatiently. "If you can't direct me, just say so."

The man with the scythe grinned, shifted his weight from the left foot to the right, and said: "Well, I've lived here, man and boy, nigh upon forty years. I think I owt t' know the way by this time. You're in Benhampton parish ever since you passed the pike."

"Then where is the village?"

"Down yonder, at the bottom o' the hill."

"And the church?"

"Oh, the church is up agin Farmer Bowstead's."

"Which is my way, then, to Farmer Bowstead's?"

Rusticus scratched his head and considered. He knew every inch of the parish; but he had no talent for description.

"You go by the road," he said, hesitatingly, "as far as Mill Pond, and then up Goodman's Lane and across t' common. But the highest way's up here by the quarry."

"Then I'll come by the quarry."

And, swift in act as decision, the traveler sprang upon the bank and climbed the slope in a moment.

"If you're going that way, my man," he added, "I'll go with you. Are you one of Farmer Bowstead's laborers?"

Whereupon he of the scythe, moved thereto,

perhaps, by something of authority in the stranger's manner, touched his cap and replied more deferentially:

"Ay, Sir. I be one of Farmer Bowstead's men."

And with this he trudged on, leading the way by a scarcely perceptible foot-track that led up transversely across a steep hill-side, divided here and there by rough stone fences. At the top of this hill there ran a lodg belt, or terrace, of fir plantation. Beyond that again, the ground seemed still to lead up to higher levels, and the road below wound down into the valley, which spread thence away into the far distance, fertile, and sunny, and golden with the coming harvest. To the left, some ten miles off or more, lay the Monmouth hills, marking the course of the Wye; of which, however, not a gleam was visible.

Temple Debenham marked all this as he scaled the hill-side, looking out the while for any first sight of house-top or spire. He was himself surprised at the keen and eager interest with which he scrutinized each foot of the way. Of every tree, every inclosure, every fence, he said: "This was once theirs." The landscape took a deeper significance, because it had been so familiar to those who were gone before. The very clodhopper plodding by his side, inasmuch as he was a son of the soil, seemed not altogether the same as other clodhoppers in Temple Debenham's eyes.

"Did you say you were born here—in this very parish?" he asked, presently.

The man nodded.

"Ay," he said. "I were born here, sure enough. And my father before me."

"You don't remember the old family, I suppose?"

The man looked at him vacantly, and shook his head.

"What old family?" said he.

"The De Benhams—the old masters here, who once owned all these parts. You must have heard of them?"

He shook his head again.

"No," he said. "I never heard tell of any such name."

And then he began to whistle.

The young man sighed, and a feeling of desolateness came upon him. His mother was right. The family, as a family, was indeed extinct, and the place thereof knew it no more. He had not thought to find the very name forgotten.

By this time they had mounted the hill-side and struck into the plantation.

Presently Rusticus, who was now plodding ahead, the path being full narrow, gave his scythe a hitch, and, half looking back, said:

"Maybe you mean the folks that belonged to th' old castle; but that was before my time."

"What old castle?" asked Debenham, quickly.

"Benhampton Castle, to be sure—Farmer Bowstead's place."

Benhampton Castle! His mother had told him nothing of this—not a word. He remembered, however, that her letter had said something about a ruin. Still he had not dreamed that this ruin was the ruin of so great a place as the name of Benhampton Castle would seem to promise.

"What do you mean by speaking of it as

Farmer Bowstead's place?" he said, after a brief silence. "Is the castle a ruin or a farm-house?"

"Both," replied Rusticus, curtly.

"Both?"

"Ay—t' master lives up in a corner like, and a' leaves the rest to th' owls."

The young man fell back a step or two, silenced and troubled. His eagerness was gone. He cared to ask no more questions. He had heard too much already.

How high they must have held their heads, how rich in all worldly possessions they must have been, those De Benhams of the olden time! And now—now their very name was not only forgotten in the place, but their ancient home, the birth-place of the race, was given over to Farmer Bowstead and the owls! Bitter reflections these. Debenham began to think that his mother was not altogether wrong in her apprehensions. It might have been better for him never to have known these things—never to have set foot in the place.

They now emerged from the plantation, and, still following the path, skirted the base of another slope, apparently no less steep than the last. Then, passing a huge stone quarry, hewn out of the hill-side like an ancient amphitheatre, and long since clothed with trees and brambles, they came to a stile; and beyond the stile to an open space where sheep were feeding.

"Yonder's the church," said Rusticus, pausing with his foot on the stile. "And yonder's the castle."

Debenham cleared the stile at a bound.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TABLET IN THE CHURCH.

"The knight's bones are dust,
And his good sword rust;
His soul is with the saints, I trust."

COLERIDGE.

BENHAMPTON CASTLE on the crest of the hill; Benhampton Church nestling against the slope a little lower down; Farmer Bowstead's stacks and barns clustered, not unpicturesquely, in the midst of the ruins; Farmer Bowstead's sheep feeding all about the pleasant sward; Farmer Bowstead's plump roan cob looking out placidly from his place of pasture in the church-yard, with his nose on the church-yard gate; in the back-ground, more hills, more woods, more belts of fir and pine; in the fore-ground, reaching far and wide on either side and down into the valley, long waving slopes of gold-brown wheat and rippling barley, rich spaces of chocolate-colored fallow, fragrant fields of white and purple clover, and broad tracts of turnip lands and beet; down in the valley, a chain of low meadows, green, alder-fringed, populous with cattle, and watered by a winding rivulet; beyond all this, the open country, and the far-away hills. Such was the scene, *en bloc*, as it were, which met Temple Debenham's eyes at the first glance. That first, all-embracing glance once given, he looked again for the details.

A long, straggling, gray stone ruin was Benhampton Castle, bounded by a line of battlemented wall which inclosed, apparently, a space of several acres. This wall, in some places quite perfect, and in others so broken away as to be

almost level with the ground, was interrupted here and there by a hollow-eyed, windowless watch-tower; while standing a little back (toward the centre, as it might be, of the inner court-yard) arose a huge square keep, literally tapestried with ivy from top to bottom. A picturesque and imposing ruin, on the whole, and superbly situated. So, at least, thought Temple Debenham, who had seen feudal ruins by the score during his life in Germany.

The church looked very small, and more modern by some centuries; but this, probably, was because it had been restored from time to time, and so restored as to lose on each occasion some of its primitive characteristics. It was surmounted by neither spire nor tower, but only by a small wooden belfry containing a single bell. And the church, like the castle keep, was almost overgrown with ivy.

The grassy hill-side on which these buildings stood was dotted over here and there with clumps of fine old trees, and presented one unbroken stretch of pasture covering perhaps twenty acres. It was evidently all that remained of the park of former times.

For some moments Debenham stood looking fixedly, silently, as one who pauses at the summit of a mountain pass when first the landscape which he has toiled so far to see breaks upon his sight. Then he drew a deep breath, and, turning to the laborer who still lingered by his side, said:

"Is the church open?"

"It's open most days," was the reply.

"But if not, shall I find the keys up at the castle?"

"Ay—you ask th' master. He'll let you in with his key. He be one o' the church-wardens."

"Thanks for your guidance, my man," said Debenham, his fingers exploring the somewhat waste recesses of his waistcoat pocket. "Get yourself some beer this hot morning."

Rusticus looked at the shilling, looked at the stranger, and looked back again at the shilling. He had been doubtful all along whether or not this dusty pedestrian was a gentleman; but the shilling decided it. So he touched his hat for the second time, consigned the coin to some pocket of unknown depth and difficulty under his smock-frock, and with a muttered "Thankee, Sir—thankee kindly," turned on his heel and went his way.

Then, very slowly, Temple Debenham went up toward the church. He could see as he drew nearer that the half-door at the porch was standing ajar, but that the inner door was closed. At the church-yard gate he paused to glance for a moment at the graves. There were but few of these—a dozen head-stones perhaps; one or two railed tombs; a score or so of plain mounds on which the grass had had long time to grow. The young man knew that none of his own people lay out here in the cold. His mother's letter told him to look for their monuments and brasses in the church; and yet his glance lingered with a kind of interest on these humble graves. Were they not the resting-places of those who had been tenants, laborers, servants of the family, generation after generation?

The roan cob snuffed at him, as if knowing him to be a stranger, and, as he opened the gate,

moved aside to let him pass. And then he went quickly up the path, and through the porch, and up to the church door. The handle turned in his grasp, and the door yielded.

His heart beat faster than usual as he took off his hat and stepped across that threshold.

He advanced a few steps—paused—looked round—looked down—saw that the very flagstones on which he was standing were covered with inscriptions and armorial bearings; that the walls were thick with tablets and mouldering hatchments; that the aisle and chancel were lined with stately monuments. Were these all De Benhams? Were these stained glass heraldries through which the noonday sun was pouring in shafts of purple and orange, these many-quartered coats of arms, these mottoes, these devices, theirs—all theirs? His brow darkened as he reflected that he, the heir, the last living representative of all these dead, was ignorant of the very insignia of the family.

But before approaching any of these monuments, before deciphering one of these inscriptions, Temple Debenham looked round for the one tablet which, above all else, he had come there to see.

"Under the north window," said his mother's letter—"Under the north window, facing the altar—a little to the left of the chancel." He had not yet advanced beyond the font, just inside the door; but he saw it instantly—a small square tablet bordered with black marble; a tablet that, even at this distance, looked newer than the rest. In another moment he was standing before it, reading the inscription.

That inscription was brief and simple enough, but it epitomized a history.

NEAR THIS SPOT LIES THE BODY OF
THE RIGHT HON. REGINALD TEMPLE DE
BENHAM,
TWENTY-EIGHTH BARON DE BENHAM,
OF BENHAMPTON
IN THE COUNTY OF MONMOUTH,
AND COUNTY OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE.
BORN APRIL 14, 1809.
DIED NOVEMBER 6, 1842.

The young man read, and, as he read, a deep, dark flush mounted slowly all over his face and brow. Then the flush faded, and left him very pale.

For a long time he stood on the same spot, in the same attitude, motionless, absorbed in profound thought. Again and again he read that brief inscription; again and again recapitulated to himself the facts which it recorded. But they were facts of which he found it difficult at first to realize the full significance. At length he drew a deep breath, sat himself down upon the altar-step, and covered his face with his hands.

The sun had shifted from the painted window and the shadows had changed upon the floor before he looked up from that reverie. And then he rose heavily, dreamily, like one just roused from sleep.

One by one, he then took the monuments as they came, staying to read the inscriptions upon such as were still legible, and setting himself, apparently, to carry away a clear and permanent recollection, not only of each separate tomb, but of the name and deeds of those who lay beneath. Happening to have a pencil and a small notebook in his pocket, he now and then scrawled a

line of memorandum as he went along; and once he stopped to sketch a hasty outline of a coat of arms. All this he did methodically, earnestly, with a strange look of concentrated purpose in his face—such a look as it had never worn in all his life before.

It was a long task; for the monuments were many—very many, very various, all more or less defaced. The inscriptions, too, were difficult to read, full for the most part of quaint spelling and crabbed abbreviations, and in some cases almost wholly illegible. Of one, for instance—a beautiful Gothic tomb surmounted by a carved canopy of delicate, lace-like tracery—he could only discover that it was erected in memory of one Alan Beaucherk De Benham, slain somewhere in battle, A.D. 1806. Of another and a very curious monument in high relief, representing a knight and his lady kneeling face to face with their children kneeling behind them, four boys behind the father and four girls behind the mother, all in painted stone, but greatly mutilated, he could make out no more than these were the effigies of one Marmaduke De Benham and Elizabeth his wife, with their family, and that they both died on the same day of the same year some time during the reign of King Henry VII. But the dates were all effaced, and the inscription, though long and apparently full of detail, was so chipped and obliterated that even an adept would have been puzzled to decipher it. Next to this group (for the monuments succeeded each other in any thing but due chronological order) came a cumbrous structure of cinque cento pillars, relieves, and decorated arches, in the midst of which reposed the headless effigy of a certain Simon Charles De Benham, thirteenth baron of that name, attired in full trunk-hose, starched ruff, and high-heeled shoon. This nobleman, said the Latin epitaph inscribed along the front of his tomb, served, while a young man and during his father's lifetime, as a volunteer in the Imperial army, under the Emperor Rodolph II; and, having valiantly distinguished himself against the Turks at the siege of Gran, in Hungary, A.D. 1595, was, for his services there rendered, created a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, the title to descend to his children and their successors forever. Then came a pompous mural tablet surmounted by a bust of one Algernon Sackville De Benham in a laced cravat and a Ramilles wig—a great man in his generation; a captain of the second troop of horse-guards; a Lord of the Bedchamber to his highness Prince George of Denmark; Lord-Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of the County of Monmouth, and Governor of the Island of Guernsey. This "high and puissant lord," as he was styled in the inscription, died at St. Peter Port, A.D. 1747, and was brought to Benhampton "with much honor" to be buried in the vaults of his family.

Then, besides these more imposing monuments, were numbers of smaller tombs, mostly of Gothic design; some richly paneled and decorated with elaborate coats of arms; some yet retaining traces of paint and gilding; some bearing recumbent figures of knights and ladies; and one adorned with the statue of a portly abbot in his mitre and robes. Here, too, were tablets, and brasses, and flag-stones, each with its record—one telling how an only son had fallen at the battle of Flodden Field, on the 9th of September, 1513;

another lamenting the death of a young bride only four months wedded; another setting forth how a whole family, seven in number, the children of Jocelyn, sixteenth Baron De Benham and Mary his wife, were swept away in less than three weeks, dating from May 12, 1667, by "a malignant fever."

More ancient, however, and for every reason more interesting than any of these, was a plain black marble sarcophagus standing in a dark recess behind the choir, upon which lay the statue of a knight in full chain armor with his hands folded in prayer, his sword and spurs girded on, and his dog at his feet. No statue in all the church was so mutilated. Not a feature of his face, not a finger of his gauntleted hands remained. His very dog was shattered almost out of form—and yet before this tomb Temple Debenham lingered longer than before any of the others; for here, as testified a modern inscription let into the wall above, lay the dust of that Geoffrey William De Benham upon whom the barony was first bestowed in 1273. "He fought," said the tablet, "for the king at the battle of Evesham, A.D. 1265; accompanied Prince Edward in his expedition to the Holy Land in 1270; and was among the first of those, his former companions of the Cross, whom that prince distinguished by his favor on returning home as king of England in 1273." Of the date of his birth, of the date of his death, of his wife's name and lineage, of all the deeds of all his later life, no vestige of record or legend remained.

Having gone the round of the monuments, and investigated every nook and corner of the church, Temple Debenham turned back as he was leaving the place and retraced his steps—not to the tablet under the north window, but to that dark corner behind the choir where lay the dust of the Crusader. Between that shadowy warrior and himself yawned an abyss of well-nigh six hundred years; and yet he felt attracted to his grave by a subtler sympathy of kinship than he could any how bring himself to feel for the hero of Gran, or the governor of Guernsey, or any others of those his predecessors who reposed close by in high funeral state. What manner of man, he wondered, was he, the stalwart founder of so long a line? Was he not only brave but wise? Was he good? Was he happy? Lived he to a green old age, building his house, planting his trees, cultivating the arts of peace, and surrounded by a numerous family? Supposing that grave were to be opened, what would be found within? Dust and ashes? A rusty sword? A pair of golden spurs? Who could tell? Ah, who indeed? Not one of all these pompous statesmen—not one of these be-frilled and be-periwigged courtiers. Least of all he, the poor obscure musician, the landless heir to all these empty honors!

So, beside the resting-place of the founder of his family, lingered and mused, half in bitterness, half in sadness, the last of the De Benhams. At length he turned away, for the day was wearing on, and he had yet the castle ruins to see; but his last glance, as he passed out into the porch, sought the grave of the Crusader.

CHAPTER XXI.

COST WHAT IT MAY.

"AN extinct family, Sir—an extinct family, and an extinct title. Not one of 'em left. All dead and gone—dead, and gone, and forgotten. Such is life! Not but what they had a good time of it, those De Benhams. Six hundred years, Sir—six hundred years! It was a long lease, and they made themselves uncommonly comfortable while it lasted. They dipped their fingers into every body's pie, and very pretty pickings they got, I can tell you—abbey lands, governorships, rich heiresses, monopolies of all sorts. Bless you! I know all about them—how they got it, and how they spent it. The spending was quick work compared with the getting, too. Why, I've an old chest up in one of my garrets yonder full of their mouldering old family papers—deeds, charters, settlements, leases, letters, and the deuce knows what besides. Many's the winter evening I've amused myself and my girls by spelling 'em over. It's made regular antiquarians of us—by Jove! it has."

So, in a big, burly voice, with his hands in his trowsers' pockets; his feet very wide apart; his studs, his watch-chain, his brass buttons glittering in the sun; and the whole length and breadth of his enormous person radiating pomposity, respectability, good-humor, and irreproachable solvency, said Farmer Bowstead.

Or, as he himself preferred to be called, Mr. Bowstead. Or, as his daughters would fain have had him called, Squire Bowstead. He had, however, no claim to the squiredom, being in truth neither more nor less than a wealthy yeoman, of yeoman parents bred; fairly well educated; ready of speech at a vestry-meeting, an agricultural dinner, or an election committee: as well known in the hunting-field as the master of the hounds himself; and a prominent man in all local and parochial matters. A well-intentioned, liberal-minded man, too, according to his light; ready with his purse; hearty and hospitable withal. No great favorite, by-the-way, with Reverend Agag Golightly, perpetual curate of St. Barnabas, Benhampton; but well liked, on the whole, by his laborers and servants, and gratefully spoken of in time of dearth or sickness by the poor of the parish.

"I presume that I am addressing the owner of—of this property?" said Temple Debenham, glancing from Farmer Bowstead to the ruins, and from the ruins back again, with some inward distaste, to Farmer Bowstead.

"I bought the castle, Sir, such as it is, and the home farm, at Colonel Smithson's death," replied the big man, audibly jingling the gold and silver in his pockets as he spoke. "No great bargain, either. A light, poor land up here among the hills; some good pasturage down in the valley; seven hundred acres altogether. As for the castle, you see what that is—building-material—mere building-material!"

Debenham had gone up from behind the church, and entered the ruins at a point where the line of outer fortification was broken away level with the ground. Here he had suddenly come face to face with Farmer Bowstead, who, well pleased to do the honors of the place, had at once begun the conversation. They were

now standing close under the shadow of the keep, a massive quadrangular building, in the later Norman style; or, perhaps, more accurately, in that transitional style which followed the Norman and preceded the early English. An inner quadrangle, or court-yard, of which only some portions remained standing, seemed to have been added at a later date, retaining the keep, apparently, as a sort of military front or gateway, and so, with some loss of architectural congruity, but much gain of picturesqueness, incorporating it with the new design. This quadrangle, of which the other three sides reached away to a considerable distance at the back, had evidently consisted of a series of galleries or corridors in the decorated style, flanked by four rectangular bastions, and further strengthened by a smaller tower in the centre of each wing. Of these galleries and corridors, the outer wall, for the most part, alone remained; and even this was, in many places, shattered out of form, covered with brown and yellow lichens, and overgrown with ivy. Fine Gothic windows, in which a tiny lozenge of stained glass was yet visible here and there; towers, of which the shell only was left; spiral stairs springing from the wall at inaccessible heights and leading nowhere; chimney-pieces rich with heraldic carvings, showing the site of stately upper chambers from which all trace of floor and ceiling had alike disappeared; arched doorways with foliated mouldings; capitals without columns, columns without capitals; undistinguishable heaps of fallen masonry; charred timbers, bushes, young trees, long rank grass, and weeds innumerable—such were the characteristics of this inner quadrangle to which Farmer Bowstead had referred, not altogether inaptly, as “mere building-material.”

“Have you used any of it,” said Debenham, gravely, “for that purpose?”

“None of this part,” replied the master of Benhampton; “but I got two capital barns and a whole row of out-buildings from the ruins of the outer walls. As good as a quarry, Sir—as good as a quarry; and cheaper to work.”

The young man checked a sigh.

“So far as I can see,” he said, looking round with a scrutinizing eye, “no part of the castle seems still habitable.”

“You won’t say that when you have been round to the other side of the keep,” rejoined the farmer. “You’ll find that we have a habitable corner—not very cheerful, perhaps, and not very luxurious; but habitable. We’ve the servants’ hall, now partitioned off into two rooms, which serve us for dining-room and sitting-room; and the guard-room, which is our kitchen; and the warder’s room, and the rooms over the gateway. We manage pretty well, on the whole. Better than Colonel Smithson managed, I should say; for the place was in a wretched state when I bought it.”

“Colonel Smithson?” said Debenham, interrogatively.

This was the second time that Farmer Bowstead had mentioned the name, and the young man wondered who Colonel Smithson was, and what he could have to do with the property.

“I put it in thorough repair,” said Farmer Bowstead, chinking his gold and silver as if his pockets were an outlying colony of Tom Tiddler’s ground. “I put in modern grates, and

new window-sashes. And I laid down two new floors: and I papered and painted every niche of wall and wainscot before coming in. The Colonel may not have been particular; but I don’t like living in a pig-sty myself.”

“So you bought this property from Colonel Smithson?” said Debenham, abruptly. Then, correcting himself with a well-bred grace that came to him naturally at times, he added: “I beg your pardon. These questions seem impertinent; but I have just been seeing the monuments in the church, and I can not help feeling some interest—some curiosity—”

“Don’t mention it, Sir—don’t mention it,” replied the farmer. “Impossible not to be interested in a fine old place like this. Yes, I bought it from Colonel Smithson; that is to say, I bought it after Colonel Smithson’s death from Colonel Smithson’s executors. An eccentric old man; had lived all his early life in India; visited no one; neither shot, nor hunted, nor did any thing that a country gentleman is expected to do. Never went to church. Never voted. Never opened a newspaper. Hated the sight of a woman—wouldn’t have a petticoat about the place. Folks about here used to say he was mad; but that was all rubbish. Eccentric—eccentric, if you like; but no more mad than you or me.”

“And how did he come by it?” asked Debenham, inwardly chafing against the man’s pompous garrulity; but enduring it for the sake of such information as might be extracted therefrom.

“By the property?”

“Yes, by the property.”

“Well, he rented it, I rather think, for several years before he bought it—rented it from the creditors, you know; for the last lord was over head and ears in debt—hadn’t an acre that he could call his own. When he died every thing came to the hammer; and Colonel Smithson bought just what I bought after him—the home farm and the castle. But he did the place a world of damage, Sir—a world of damage.”

“Ay—how so?”

“Neglect, Sir—sheer neglect; let it fall to pieces faster than need have been. The banquetting-hall was quite perfect when he first came here, and nearly all the north side of this quadrangle, but he would not do the least thing to preserve the place. Except in the corner where he lived—where I live now—he never replaced a tile, or put in a pane of glass, or shored up an insecure bit of wall, or spent a sixpence to save the place from ruin. And so it fell from bad to worse, and became what you see. Age, of course, has done much; but wind and weather and neglect have done more.”

“So that it has really suffered more damage within the last seventeen years than might have come to it, with fair treatment, in the course of a century,” said the young man, bitterly.

“Colonel Smithson bought the property somewhere about March, 1843, and we’re now in 1860,” muttered Farmer Bowstead, half aloud. “Yea, that’s seventeen years. Humph! I took you for a stranger, Sir, but you seem to be readier with these dates than myself.”

“Probably because I have just come from the church, where I have been reading the inscription on—the latest tablet,” replied Debenham, with some hesitation.

The suspicious look cleared off from the farmer's hearty face like a shadow.

"To be sure, to be sure," said he. "I told you he bought it when the last lord died, and you saw by the inscription that it happened in November, forty-two. Quite right, Sir—quite right. The Colonel did buy it seventeen years and five months ago, by the book. And I bought it in 'fifty-six—four years ago next Michaelmas. And there you've the whole history of Benhampton Castle. It has only changed hands twice since the old family died out, and they held it over six hundred years."

"And now, you say, there is not one of the name left?" said the young man, with assumed indifference.

"No. I said it was an extinct family; but it is not yet an extinct name. Lady De Benham is still living."

The young man could not repress an involuntary movement. It was the first time he had thought of his mother by that title.

"The estate was clogged with an annuity for her," continued the owner of Benhampton; "and she draws it to this day."

"From you?" said Debenham, quickly.

"No, no. Not from these lands. These are mine, fairly bought and fairly sold—freehold—unencumbered—no mistake about them. No—Lady De Benham's pittance, such as it is, comes from land down in the valley. I have nothing to do with it. I should be very sorry if I had. Fancy forty pounds a year for the widow of Lord De Benham, one of the oldest barons in the English peerage! I should be ashamed to have the pitiful sum pass through my hands."

"The feeling does you honor, Mr. Bowstead," said the young man, in a low voice.

And at that moment he liked the burly farmer so well that he would gladly have shaken hands with him. He felt as if the man must be a good man in that he spoke of Lady De Benham, even in this rough fashion, with compassion and respect. And, besides, he gave her her title—that title which her son now heard for the first time, and which sounded so pleasantly in his ears. He would perhaps have been ashamed to acknowledge it even to himself, but that Farmer Bowstead should have been the first to speak to him of his mother by that name affected him almost as a special claim upon his regard.

In the mean while the owner of Benhampton, all unconscious of what was passing in the mind of this sun-burnt stranger, stared at the compliment, and felt half inclined to resent it as a liberty.

"You spoke of the banqueting-hall just now," said Debenham, resuming the conversation. "Where did it stand?"

"There—where you see that large and window. The chimney-piece and all the east wall are still pretty perfect, and even the hinges of the door. Would you like to make the round of the ruins?"

This was precisely what Debenham had been longing to do from the first; so Farmer Bowstead, who really proved to be a capital cicerone, led the way, and the young man followed.

They began with the site of the banqueting-hall—a magnificent room, now roofless, windowless, floorless, carpeted with weeds and brambles, and open to all the winds of heaven. This hall,

said Farmer Bowstead, measured sixty feet in length and twenty-four in width, and had formerly contained a musicians' gallery over the door, as well as a paneled and gilded ceiling of extraordinary richness. Over the chimney-piece (which, being of carved stone, was still comparatively uninjured) the young man recognized the same coat of arms which he had just now sketched in the church.

Next after the banqueting-hall came the cook's kitchen—an area some thirty feet square, but now left with only two sides standing. Some fragments of a groined and vaulted roof, and the great cavernous fire-place, however, yet remained—that hospitable fire-place at which many an ox had been roasted whole in the good old times of Debenham's feasting forefathers.

"There's a chimney for you!" said Farmer Bowstead. "We don't build such chimneys as that nowadays."

And then Debenham peeped up the great yawning funnel which, black and mysterious as a coal shaft, went narrowing up to a square glimpse of daylight some forty feet above.

From the kitchen they then passed on to the site of what had once been the servants' hall, and thence, threading their way amidst a wilderness of weeds and rubbish, made the circuit of the whole quadrangle.

Of this, little more than a line of dilapidated outer wall remained standing; and though his guide professed to know all the topography of the place, saying of one spot that it had been the armory, of another that it was anciently a tennis-court, of a third that it was the site of the guard-room, and so forth, still the young man felt that it was mere guess-work, and more likely, on the whole, to be wrong than right.

Coming back thus to the keep, and approaching it from the other side, he found himself all at once in the midst of inhabited ground. The ivy on this side had been partially cleared away to make way for a smart green door and trellised porch and some half dozen modern windows. The porch was clustered over with white roses; the windows showed glimpses of white blinds and scarlet curtains, and were flanked with boxes of mignonnette and stocks; and the weed-grown court-yard was here transformed into a slip of smooth-shaven lawn islanded with brilliant flower-beds.

Debenham came to a sudden halt. The cheerfulness of the place was almost startling in contrast with the desolation of the rest; but its very cheerfulness jarred upon him.

In vain did the hospitable farmer urge him to go in and rest a while; in vain press upon him the refreshment of "a cup of tea, or a glass of home-brewed ale." He felt as if he could not bring himself to cross the threshold, or break bread under that rock-tree—as a guest. He felt he could no longer endure to talk indifferently of the place and its history, or to keep up the semblance of a mere stranger's curiosity regarding it. His heart was too full, and he wanted now, above all else, to be alone.

"My girls would make you kindly welcome, Sir," said Farmer Bowstead. "Let yourself be persuaded. It's altogether against my creed to let the stranger turn away from my door in this way."

At that moment, however, Debenham's quick

ear caught the first few notes of a popular polka "jangled out of tune," upon a piano whose days were evidently in the sear and yellow leaf. There flashed upon him a horrible vision of the Miss Bowsteads, red-cheeked, red-elbowed, possibly red-haired, and musical exceedingly. The vulgar measure grated upon his ear like a profanity. He recoiled impatiently.

"No, no," he said. "I must go. Time presses, and I have a long walk back. Many thanks—good-night."

And with this he raised his hat, turned abruptly on his heel, and strode away.

Leaving the ruins by the way he had come, he neither paused nor looked back; but, with the swift, assured step of one who has a definite purpose before him, made direct for the church-yard gate, pushed it open, went up the path, took off his hat in the porch, walked straight up to the altar rails, bowed his face upon his hands, and knelt down in silence.

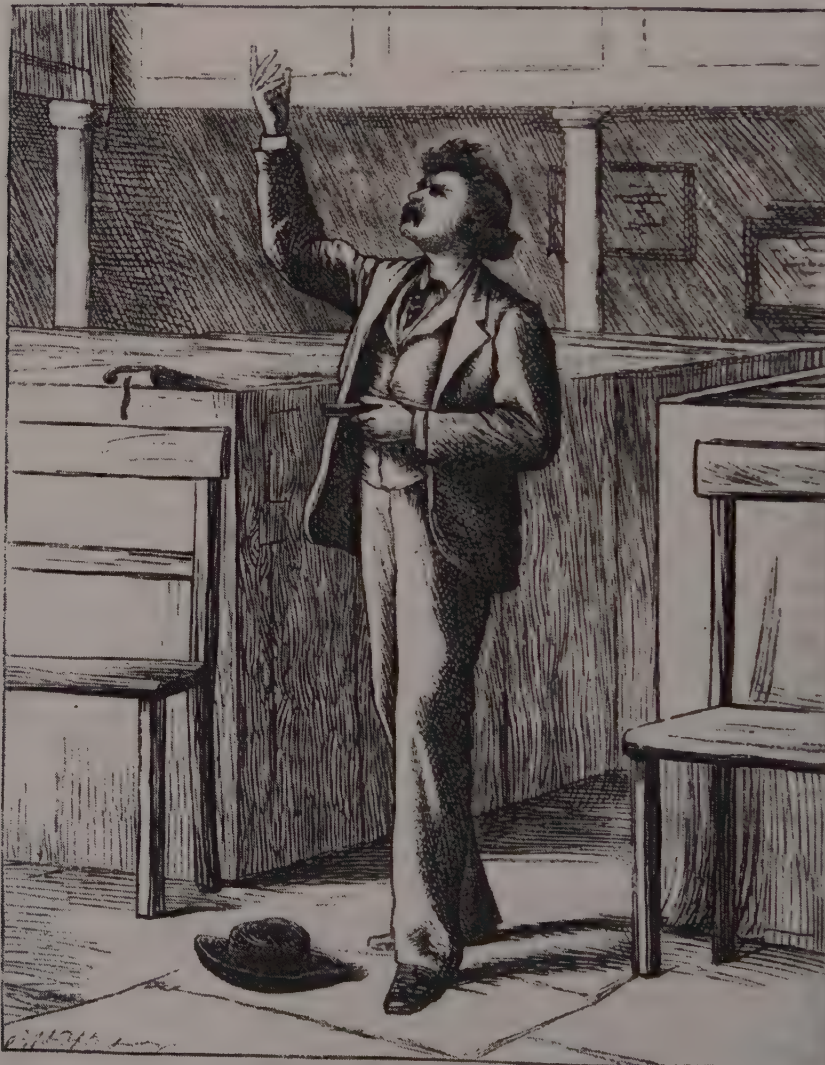
He remained thus for some moments; then rose—fetched a small Testament from the near-

est pew—turned again toward the altar—put the book reverently to his lips, and said, almost in a whisper:

"I swear it—so help me God!"

He had taken a solemn vow, and taken it in the most solemn way he could devise, with the dust of a long line of ancestors beneath his feet, and their monuments looking down upon him from every side. No wonder, then, that, having replaced the little Testament and cast one last glance at the tablet under the north window, he turned away with a graver brow and a slower step than before.

Then, still intent upon his own thoughts, he replaced his hat, as it were, mechanically, passed out through the church-yard, and followed the downward path as far as the stile. Here he stopped and looked back. The sun was now fast bending toward the west, and the ruins were all aglow in the rich light of the early summer evening. He gazed at them long and earnestly, and, as he gazed, there again came into his face that strange, concentrated look—that look of



"I SWEAR IT—SO HELP ME GOD!"

hard resolve—which was soon to become its fixed and habitual expression.

"I have sworn it," he said, scarcely conscious that he was speaking aloud. "I have sworn it, and I will achieve it—cost what it may."

The next moment he had bounded over the stile, and was swinging back to Monmouth at the rate of something better than four miles an hour.

In the mean while Farmer Bowstead, presiding over a well-furnished tea-table, discussed the stranger's visit with his daughters—three pleasant, comely young women enough, not one of whom, by-the-way, was either red-elbowed or red-haired.

"As off-hand a fellow as ever I saw in my life," said the master of Benhampton Castle. "I asked him in—offered him a glass of our old ale—and he barely thanked me. Just turned on his heel and marched off, as if my house wasn't good enough for him."

"Was he young, papa?" asked one of the damsels.

"About six or eight-and-twenty."

"And good-looking?"

"Not according to my notions, Miss Bella."

"I'm sure he was a gentleman," said the youngest and prettiest of the three.

Farmer Bowstead frowned, shook his head, and helped himself to an enormous slice of meat-pie.

"Not a bit of it, my dear," he said. "Not a bit of it. A shabby-looking fellow—pedestrian tourist, evidently—an actor, or painter, or magazine writer, or something of that sort, I'll be bound. Not a bit of a gentleman!"

CHAPTER XXII.

MONEY VERSUS FAME.

"The world is mine oyster."—KING HENRY IV.

MR. ARCHIBALD BLYTH was not given to early rising. Under his fellow-traveler's rule and governance he consented, coyly enough, to rise at six, or even, on especial occasions, at half past five; but, left to himself, he would go on sleeping the sleep of the just till eight, or nine, or even ten o'clock on the brightest summer morning that ever shone. Thus it came to pass that at nine A.M. on the day following the events last related, when the little world of Cillingford was all up and doing, and the birds outside his window were singing for joy of the sunshine, and even Mr. Alleyne was engaged upon his matutinal broiled trout and coffee, Archibald Blyth was suddenly wrenched from the farthest Elysium by the pressure of a hand on his shoulder and the sound of a voice in his ear.

"Awake, arise, or be forever fallen!" said the familiar, half-mocking tones that he knew so well. "Why, man alive! do you know what o'clock it is?"

Archie sat up, gasping, and rubbing his eyes.

"What—Debenham—back already?" he stammered. "Where do you come from?"

"From Monmouth, where I slept last night, and breakfasted this morning at half past six. I have had such a glorious walk! You never saw such effects of sunshine and color."

"And you have transacted the business you went about?"

"Yes."

"It didn't take long, any how," said Archie, staring at Debenham with all his might.

The other looked grave.

"Look here, my dear fellow," he said, after a moment's hesitation. "I don't want to be mysterious with you. My solitary expedition has puzzled you—"

"Enormously."

"Well, be puzzled no longer. I went to visit my father's grave. He was buried not many miles from Monmouth, and I had never seen the place before. Didn't know where it was, in fact, till three days ago. Now you have it, and I had rather the subject was not named between us again."

So Archie, with a very serious face, protested that no allusion to it should be made on his part.

"And now," said Debenham, "I want you to get up and come for a walk—and a talk. I have a heap of things to say to you."

"I'll be ready in ten minutes," said Archie, scrambling out of bed.

"But you've had no breakfast."

"Doesn't matter a bit," sputtered Archie, with his head and face in a great round tub of cold water. "I'll put a crust in my pocket."

Debenham, however, would not hear of this; so he ran down to get his friend's breakfast prepared in the kitchen, and in about half an hour they were strolling together by the river.

"You have seen Miss Alleyne, of course?" said Archie, finding that Debenham did not begin the promised conversation.

To which Debenham—looking away, and full, apparently, of other thoughts—replied in an abstracted voice that, supposing the Alleynes to be at breakfast, he had gone straight to Archie's room, and seen no one.

"They asked me in to tea last evening," said Archie. "I thought it was kind of them—in your absence."

Here he paused for a reply; but receiving none, went on:

"We played two rubbers, with dummy. Mr. Alleyne took dummy, and won every thing before him."

"Ah—indeed!"

"So for once, you see, I had Miss Alleyne for my partner. Are you jealous?"

Debenham smiled faintly, and shook his head.

"What did you talk about?" he said.

"Well, let me see—of you, for one thing."

"Yes. What did they say about me?" asked Debenham, looking round with more appearance of interest than he had yet shown.

"I must consider. Mr. Alleyne said you were a good conversationalist. You reminded him of some famous wit—I forget who. And then he said that music was a poor profession—he meant in the way of getting money."

"He's quite right," said Debenham, bitterly. "It's a beggarly profession! What else did he say?"

"He thought you very clever, but—"

"But what?"

"He feared you were very unpractical."

"Unpractical? Confound his insolence! On what ground does he—an acquaintance of ten days' standing—presume to base his opinion?"

"Ah, I didn't ask him that," said Archie, dryly.

"And Juliet—what did she say? Did she agree with him?"

"I don't know. She didn't say so."

"Did she contradict him?"

"No."

"Did she speak of me at all?"

"Yes; she asked if I expected to hear from you this morning. I fancy she thought you had gone away rather abruptly."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No; but I fancied I saw it in her manner. You told her where you were going, of course?"

"Why 'of course?' She's not my wife yet—we are not even formally engaged. I told her I was summoned away on family business, and might not be back for a day or two. I told you the same. It was quite enough."

Archie looked down, and was silent. The gloom and irritability of his friend's manner both pained and perplexed him. He seemed out of tune with all things. He had called his beloved art "a beggarly profession." His indignation against Mr. Alleyne seemed out of all proportion with the magnitude of the offense. Even in the tone in which he had spoken of Miss Alleyne there was a something which grated upon Archie's ear. True lovers, according to his simple creed, should have no secrets from each other; and although he did not argue the question out in so many words, he felt instinctively that the young lady had a fuller right than himself to Debenham's confidence. It was plain that something had gone wrong; but then what could that something be?

"You said you had heaps of things to talk to me about," he said presently. "When are you going to begin?"

"Now, if you are disposed to listen. Shall we sit down on this old trunk, and smoke a pipe the while?"

It was the same felled trunk on which he had sat with Miss Alleyne only two mornings ago; but his mind was full of other matters now, and he did not even remember it. So they sat down, lit their pipes, and smoked for some moments in silence.

"Do you remember the day we came to this place?" asked Debenham, at length.

"Remember it!" said Archie. "I should think so. It was the hottest day I ever knew in my life."

"And the meadow by the river-side, where we rested and you fell asleep?"

"Thrice-blessed meadow, and thrice thrice-blessed sleep! I have the liveliest recollection of both."

Debenham frowned. He was in no mood for jesting; and the levity of Archie's tone displeased him.

"I can not, of course, expect you also to remember the subject of our conversation that afternoon," he said.

"Not unassisted, perhaps; but if you will refresh my memory—"

"We were talking of money, and how to make it. I said I should like to earn a thousand a year; and you said that, with good abilities and a good education, a man might command as much as that, and even more—in commerce. Do you remember that?"

"Yes; I remember it perfectly."

"Was it true—or a mere figure of speech?"

"True, of course. Literally true."

"But how? In what way? Not in a merchant's office?"

"Yes; even in a merchant's office, if by that you mean sitting all one's life at a desk in a counting-house. Managing clerks, for instance, and foreign correspondents, get famous salaries sometimes. But that was not what I meant when I spoke of the sort of openings that are to be found in commerce for men of real talent and extensive acquirements."

"What did you mean, then, Archie?" said Debenham, earnestly—so earnestly that Archie, catching a sudden glimmer of the truth, laid down his pipe and looked full in his friend's face.

"Why, Debenham!" he exclaimed; "is it possible—"

"Yes, it's quite possible," interrupted the other, hurriedly but very decisively. "My opinions on that subject are changed. I am tired of being poor. I want money. I am determined to have money. I don't care how hard I work for it—I am used to work hard. And I don't care what sort of work it is, if it only pays me well enough. That is the point. It must pay. And a little will not content me. I have known what it is to be poor—very poor; and now I mean to know what it is to be rich. Only tell me how—only show me the way. Let the path be steep and thorny; the steeper and thornier it is, the better I shall like it."

"My dear fellow," said Archie, "you positively take my breath away!"

"But the way—only show me the way!" persisted Debenham, almost fiercely.

"You can't make a fortune in a day," said Archie. "There's no way to do that."

"Of course not; but I would be willing to work with double energy. I would be willing to put a week's labor into a day; a month's into a week; a year's into a month. I would be willing to spend brain and fibre at a double rate—ay, at ten times a double rate, if that were all. A man may surely push the hands on in that way?"

"Ay—if he doesn't cripple the clock meanwhile," said Archie, sententiously. "But you must let me think for a minute or two. You have so taken me by surprise that I seem not to have an idea in my head."

And then, planting his elbows on his knees and resting his chin upon his hands, he began, slowly and clearly, though in a somewhat roundabout way, to explain in what special directions a man of great capital might employ, and amply remunerate, the services of a man of high education. There were foreign loans, for instance, in the negotiation of which the nicest tact was required, and the most discriminating knowledge of all sorts of languages. And there were foreign missions in abundance—missions involving the adjustment of differences, the legalization of commercial rights, the establishing of difficult and distant business relations, and so forth. Political knowledge, too, commanded its premium. Enormous fortunes had been made at a blow by those who were skilled in watching the political horizon, and knew how to take prompt advantage of every change and rumor of change. In short, though he could deal only in generali-

ties, Archie said quite enough to convince his friend that his brains were marketable, and that if the world were indeed an oyster, he had a fairer chance of opening it than most penniless adventurers.

"And so you are really in earnest?" said the City man, when their long talk came at last to an end.

"I am really in earnest."

"And it is to be commerce *versus* music—money *versus* fame?"

"It is to be commerce and money for the next ten years of my life—or the next twenty, if need be. I don't say that it may not be music and fame after that; when I am a rich man, and can afford to indulge my tastes."

"Then all I can say is, that I am heartily glad of it," said Archie, warmly. "You never would, and never could, have earned more than a bare living by music; and even so you must have gone on giving lessons all your life. And you would never have been looked upon as a gentleman—at least in England. I always felt that with your splendid talents you ought to make a fortune. And so you will, old fellow. So you will."

"I will try," said Debenham, more to himself than to Archie.

"And I will speak about it to my cousin Hardwicke the moment we get back to London."

"Thank you, Archie—thank you. That is, if I do not speak to Mr. Hardwicke myself."

And with this they rose up and strolled on side by side; both silent; both weary of talking; each absorbed in his own thoughts.

As for Archie, he was lost in wonder at what had taken place, and kept stealing furtive glances now and then at his companion. The more he thought of all that had been said the less he seemed able to believe it. What a revolution! What a change! Who more indifferent to money, who more devoted to his art than Debenham but one little month ago? And now—Well, the motive, at all events, was not far to seek. He wanted to make money that he might marry Miss Alleyne. Nothing could be clearer; nothing, after all, more natural. It was just the old, old story over again. That is to say, it was the old, old story—with a difference. For love, which makes fools of so many, had, from Archie's point of view, made a wise man of his friend. And then he smiled to himself, thinking that it was like the old Antwerp legend turned upside down; for here, instead of the smith turning painter, the artist, for love's dear sake, was about to give up his art for the drudgery of anvil and hammer. Such was the miracle-working power of a pretty face!

But in all these assumptions and conclusions, obvious as they seemed, Archie was wrong—entirely and fundamentally wrong. That a marvellous change had come upon Temple Debenham was true; but neither love nor Miss Alleyne had any thing whatever to do with it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"HE LOVES AND HE RIDES AWAY."

Mr. and Miss Alleyne were both out when the young man returned to the "Silver Trout," whereupon Debenham remembered that he must write to his mother.

"You may depend they have only gone over to the other side of the river," said Archie.

"Suppose, then, you just take the ferry across, like a good fellow, and see," suggested Debenham, hurriedly.

"And if I find them, what shall I say?"

"Oh—say that I have come back tired, and—and that I have an important letter to write before the Chepstow coach goes by."

"And that you will follow me by-and-by?"

"Yes—of course. In less than an hour."

So Archie went off, not without some inward wonder at his friend's want of *empressement*, and Debenham locked himself into his room, and sat down to write a long letter to his mother. The task, however, was not an easy one. He felt as if he ought to say a great deal, but his inclination prompted him to say very little. Mrs. Debenham would expect him, perhaps, to write about his father, and the castle, and the church, and the monuments, and the ancient glories of the De Benhams—yet what could he say of these things? He had nothing to say about them. The past was past, and all his thoughts now were of the future. Well, then, he must write about the future; he must write what was really in his mind. At all events, he must write something.

So, having made two or three unsuccessful beginnings, he at length took a fresh sheet of paper, and dashed off what he had to say, just as it came.

"CELLINGFORD, August—

"MY DEAREST MOTHER,—I told you in my last that I had found your letter addressed to me at the Monmouth post-office. Since then I have been to Benhampton. I am sorry that my knowledge of the place and its history comes so late. I am sorry that at sixteen I was not as wise as I am now at six-and-twenty. I should have shaped my life altogether differently, and have worked with quite other ends in view. Late, however, as this knowledge comes to me, I hope it is not too late. At all events, I mean to begin life anew.

"Do you remember, dear mother, in that essay of Macaulay's that we were reading just before I came away—I mean the one on Warren Hastings—there was some account of how the little fellow, while yet a mere child, was taken to see the grand old family place that had once belonged to his own people; and how, stealing away from the rest, he went and lay down under a tree by himself, taking in every detail of the scene, and, child though he was, silently resolving to win that old house and those broad acres back again? Well, mother, I think if you had taken me to Benhampton ten or twelve years ago, and shown me those ruins and those tombs, I should have taken the same resolution; and by this time, perhaps, I should have fulfilled it.

"However, it is of little use to think of what might have been. Let it be enough that, as a man, I have arrived at that point from which Warren Hastings started as a boy. I mean at once to give up the profession of music—to look

out for some lucrative employment—and to think of nothing but making and saving money for many a year to come. And then, mother, I hope some day to see you again occupying your proper station in society; and I hope myself to buy back the old place, and restore the old castle, and sustain as worthily as I may my father's name and title.

"I fear this will sound to you like a wild and impossible scheme. Still, I can but fail; and, wild and impossible though it may be, I must henceforth devote to it such strength of mind and body as are mine.

"We leave Cillingford to-morrow, or at the latest on Saturday; pleasant neighbors at the inn, charming scenery, and good fishing having already beguiled us into lingering here for nearly three weeks. You may direct your next letter to Ross. I think I shall return in about a fortnight—that is, by the end of the fifth week. Archie gives me good hope that I may find something to do in the City; and I shall therefore be glad to have a few days at my own disposal, to look about me, before St. Hildegard's is reopened.

"I continue to be as idle as ever; doing nothing in the way of music—that is to say, doing nothing worth mention. A little *Toccata* in the antique style, however, penciled down in bed the other night when I could not sleep, might please you.

"The weather is superb. We have had a few showers: but not one wet day since we left Chestow. Archie, of course, maintains his character as the best of traveling companions. He is really a paragon of cheerfulness and good-nature. I have made up my mind, *liebe Mutter*, that you must go somewhere out of London for a week or two in September: so please not to oppose me. You know what a determined fellow I can be when I choose.

"I find myself at the foot of the last page of my second sheet, so good-by for to-day.

"Ever, dearest mother, your loving son,

"DE BENHAM.

"P.S.—I sign myself, you see, with my own lawful signature; but of course only to you. For the rest of the world, I remain plain Temple Debenham—at all events, till I have made my fortune."

This he wrote in hot haste, without pause or correction; and, for fear that he might not be satisfied with it on perusal, sealed it up and consigned it to the Cillingford post-box without even reading it over. And perhaps, on the whole, it was as good a letter as he could have written at that time. He loved his mother with a very deep and tender love; but he could not help feeling that he ought long since to have been told the secret of his birth. He knew that Lady De Benham had acted for the best, according to her judgment; but he also knew that she had pushed the parental right of judgment beyond its proper limits. Knowing how every rood of his inheritance had passed away, and concluding that her son must therefore renounce all the privileges of his birth, she had trained him to regard obscurity as his portion in life, and to desire no other. But then, as he told himself again and again, she had no right to leap at that conclusion, and still less right to act upon it. He ought to have

known the truth at sixteen, at the latest. He had an undoubted legal right to know it at twenty-one. Not knowing it, he had been virtually excluded from that freedom in the choice of a career which is a young man's most precious privilege. And he had wasted ten of the best years of his life.

It was natural that he should feel sore when he thought of these things, and that he should chafe impatiently against them in his mind; and it would have been excusable if he had evinced some of his impatience and soreness in his letter. But he had put a control upon his pen; and if he had written somewhat coldly, entering into few particulars, and expressing himself with unwonted brevity and decision, still he had not given utterance to one bitter or reproachful word. In so far, then, as the letter was temperate and not unloving, it fulfilled its purpose, and was, as has already been said, as good a letter as he could have written under the circumstances.

But if he succeeded in keeping his regrets and his bitterness below the surface, he was none the less affected by them, and by the momentous resolution which he had taken. A great change had come upon him—a change of which he was himself vaguely conscious, and which none of those about him could for one moment fail to observe. His whole nature seemed suddenly to have indurated. A strange, hard look had settled on his mouth; and when he smiled it seemed less like an impulse than a deliberate effort of the will. Then he felt so much older. He looked out upon the world from such a different point of view. He had parted at one fell swoop from the hopes, and dreams, and pleasures of his whole life, and taken up with the hardest of hard realities. And this he did, knowing the magnitude of the sacrifice—counting the cost—resolute to pay the price, come in what form it might.

"Ay, come in what form it might!" He had fallen into a way of repeating this and similar phrases to himself within the last day or two; not that he attached any special meaning to the words, but because the mere repetition of them seemed to strengthen him for the battle to come.

In the first moment of meeting Miss Alleyne saw that there was a cloud, a shadow, a something upon his brow, which was not there before he went away. And then she concluded that he had met with some loss or disappointment in the matter of his journey, and her whole heart filled with sympathy for him. She tried to show this sympathy in a thousand pretty, quiet ways all through the day, telling herself that he would be sure to confide his troubles to her when they were alone, and thinking how she would try to comfort him in this and every other mischance that might befall him. But somehow the afternoon went by, and they separated at dinner-time without having been alone together for a moment. Once, however, he had pressed her hand unseen; and when Mr. Alleyne, putting up his canvas and colors, invited the friends, as usual, to take tea, he accepted the invitation with a glance that seemed to say for whose sake he was glad to do so.

"It is so good to have you back again, old fellow," said Archie, as they sat by-and-by at their accustomed table in the kitchen-window. "The place seemed awfully dull yesterday with-

out you. Isn't this a fine big pike? I caught him last evening, just above the weir; and, not thinking you would be back so soon, I was lamenting that I must sit down to him alone. How glad I am that I did not send him to the Alleynes!"

"It is indeed a Goliath of a pike, my little David," said Temple, "and capitally cooked."

But though he praised the fish he sent his plate away almost untasted. He could not eat. His mind was ill at ease, and many things were perplexing him. So he presently left Archie to finish his dinner alone, and betook himself to the river-side, where he walked up and down in front of the inn, anxiously thinking.

Should he, or should he not, tell Miss Alleyne? That was the question. It would be pleasant to tell her; and perhaps he ought to tell her. But then, how would it profit her to know? Would it add one iota to her happiness or her love? It ought not to do so. Nay, more—it was impossible that it should do so. Still, it was sweet to know that he was loved for himself alone. Besides, why should he put her discretion to so severe a test? She was very young to be trusted with so grave a secret; and a secret it must remain—profound, strict, inviolable. Surely it would, on the whole, be wiser to keep silence, at all events for a year or two longer. And then so many things might happen in a year or two!

Deliberating thus, he strolled to and fro till Archie came out; and by-and-by they were joined by Mr. and Miss Alleyne. Mr. Alleyne, however, brought his glass and his decanter of port into the porch, and sat there smoking his customary post-prandial cigar, while the others went down to the landing-place to see the cows ferried home from their pastures on the opposite side of the river.

"You did not expect me back to day, Juliet?" said De Benham, finding that Archie lingered discreetly in the rear.

"I think I did—that is, I hoped."

"I dispatched my journey as quickly as I could," he said, hesitatingly; "because—because I find it is absolutely necessary for me to be in London by the end of another fortnight, and therefore—"

"I know," said Miss Alleyne; the smile with which she had looked up at the beginning of his sentence having vanished in a sudden paleness. "And therefore you must resume your tour. When do you think of going?"

"I suppose—I fear—to-morrow."

He felt a slight tremor in the hand which rested on his arm; but that was all.

"It seems to come suddenly at last," he said, half-apologetically; "but we have had three weeks at Cillingford already, and—and I am bound to consider Archie a little. For myself, I should desire nothing better than to spend the whole time here."

She tried to force a smile.

"I know that," she replied, simply; "but it will do you more good to travel. You work so hard in London, and you ought to go back so much stronger."

"My darling!" he said, tenderly; and then he thought he would tell her, after all. "I mean to work harder than ever now," he began, "and to be better paid for my work. In fact, I am

going to give up music, and take to some more profitable occupation."

"Give up music!" repeated Miss Alleyne. "Impossible!"

"*'A cœur vaillant, rien d'impossible.'* That was Henri Quatre's motto, and it shall be mine."

"But what other occupation—?"

"At present I can hardly say. I only know that I have certain marketable acquirements, and that I mean to sell myself to the highest bidders. Would you not like to be rich, Juliet?"

"Not in the least. I only desire to be happy."

"But have you no ambition?"

"Of that sort, none whatever."

"Well, but you have some ambition for me?"

"Yes, I have ambition for you; but still not of that sort. I should like you to be famous; I do not care that you should be rich."

"But this is mere romance, my sweet," urged the lover. "Money represents the graces and charities, to say nothing of the comforts, of life. It is impossible that you should not care for these. You might as well say that you placed no value upon rank or station."

"Nor do I," said Miss Alleyne, promptly; "unless as the reward of personal merit."

"Do you mean that if I, for instance, were heir to an hereditary coronet, transmitted through a long line of ancestors, you would be no prouder of me than as plain Temple Debenham?"

"I should be no whit prouder of you," she answered, radiant and glowing. "On the contrary, I should long for you to achieve some distinction that might raise you above your title!"

But De Benham had no response for the girl's generous answer. He only looked away, and said, coldly:

"So—you are a democrat! I had no idea of that. You and I must never talk politics, then, *cara mia*; for we should surely disagree."

And from that moment he made up his mind that he would not tell her.

Yet, when he went to bed at night and was alone in his own little room, his heart smote him, and he wondered at the change that had come upon him. But a few days ago, and he was as unworldly as herself. But a few days ago, and he, too, would have chosen to earn rather than inherit his honors. He had then as little care for wealth, as little fear of poverty, as keen an appetite for fame, as the warmest enthusiast could desire; and now— Well, now he was Lord De Benham, a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, and twenty-ninth Baron of his name; the last male representative of his family; friendless; fortuneless; landless; with scarce a second coat to his back, and something less than five pounds in his pocket! These were pregnant facts—such facts, surely, as might well excite a man for some change of opinion. Besides, it was no mean ambition, after all, to aim at reinstating a grand old name, and reviving the honors of an ancient house. Nay, was it not something more than an ambition? Was it not a duty?

So reasoning, and so comforting himself, he decided that it was a duty—clearly a duty; and, having arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, he laid his head upon the pillow and fell fast asleep.

The next day they parted, stealing a few last words in the porch before Mr. Alleyne was down.

"I have said nothing to your father, dearest," said the lover. "I dared not, in my present beggarly position; but I have every hope that in the course of a few weeks I shall have found some employment commanding a fixed salary, and then I shall feel that I have a better right to speak, and a better chance of being heard."

Miss Alleyne looked down with a somewhat heightened color, and made no reply.

"He has invited me to call upon him at Kensington," added De Benham. "May I come the day after your return home?"

"I can not tell when that will be," replied Miss Alleyne. "You have seen how capriciously papa takes up and lays aside his picture. He may finish it in ten days, or he may stay here for three weeks longer."

"But you will let me know—you will write to me!"

"How is that possible? What would my father say?"

"But, my darling, you would not leave me without news of you for three whole weeks! You might be ill—a thousand things might happen! I had hoped that you would write to me every day."

Miss Alleyne shook her head.

"You can not seriously mean to refuse me!" exclaimed the lover.

"I am very sorry—so sorry; but you ought not to ask me."

"Once a week, then—only once a week!"

"No. It would not be right."

"Right!" he echoed, impatiently. "And our engagement?"

She turned her face away. Her lips quivered; but she made no reply. He repeated the question.

"There can be no engagement between us," she said, falteringly, "without my father's sanction."

He paused a moment before replying; but when he did speak it was with the calmness of suppressed irritation.

"Very well," he said. "In that case I must speak to Mr. Alleyne before I leave Cillingford. I believe that I shall injure my cause by doing so at this time; but I must take my chance."

"I do not counsel you to speak to him," said Miss Alleyne, gently. "I would rather you should act as you think best."

"But you say there can be no engagement—"

"That is true, Temple; but why need there be one—just yet? Be patient, dear. I know that you love me—and I will wear your ring, and I will think of you day and night while we are parted. It will be but for three or four weeks, at the most."

And with this she put up her other hand, and so clasping his arm quite round, looked up at him, half smiling, half in tears.

"But if you should be ill!"

"I have not the slightest intention of being ill. I never was better."

"And how shall I know when you go home?"

"Call at the house now and then, when you are passing that way, and inquire of the servants."

"Humph! And you don't care a bit about not hearing from me all that time?"

"I do care; but I know it is not for long. And now you must tell me where you will be

each day of your tour, that I may follow you upon the map, and always know where you are."

So De Benham tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and made out a list of such places as he and Archie had proposed to stop at *en route*; and by the time this was done Mr. Alleyne came down and began ringing for coffee.

"You will come in presently to wish papa good-by," said she, preparing to be gone at the first echo of the bell.

"Yes; but I must have my farewell kiss now. My love—my own Juliet! Ah, surely as much my own as if we were never so formally engaged!"

For a moment she let herself be folded in his arms, pressed to his heart, kissed on brow, and eyes, and lips.

"You do love me?" he said, passionately.

"Yes," she whispered, "I do love you—with my whole heart—with my whole heart!"

But even as she said the words she slipped from his embrace and was gone.

Half an hour later they shook hands and parted quite gayly and politely, as a well-bred lady and gentleman should.

"We shall expect to see you at Kensington, remember," said Mr. Alleyne, graciously, as he followed the young men to the gate.

Whereupon they thanked him, looked forward to the earliest opportunity of paying their respects, exchanged all due civilities and good wishes, and took their departure in heavy marching order, knapsack on back and staff in hand, like two pious pilgrims of the olden time.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIRST PLUNGE.

It may be conjectured that neither Archie nor Temple were sorry when the tour came to an end, and they shook hands on parting at the Paddington terminus. The real pleasure of the excursion was all over for Archie when Miss Alleyne came upon the scene; and, somehow, even when Miss Alleyne was left behind, and they were again wandering together day after day by river and ruin, woodland and vale, the old feeling of *camaraderie* was missing, and things were never the same again. De Benham, absorbed by one fixed idea, was a changed man; and Archie, though attributing that change to a wrong cause, could not but feel the effects of it at every turn. De Benham silent and gloomy, De Benham brooding over the lost fortunes of his family, De Benham pondering the one great problem of his own future life, seemed to him no other than De Benham desperately in love and thinking perpetually of Miss Alleyne. Even when the conversation reverted, as it was always reverting now, to money and money-making, Archie, wearied to death of the subject, still believed that his friend's sole aim was to get rich for the sake of the woman he loved.

And then Temple, on his side, grudged every day that deferred the execution of his project. Gone for him was that enchanted time

"Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower,"

when only to walk abroad in the sunshine and breathe the morning air was joy, and inspiration,

and gain immeasurable. He now only longed for the toil and press of active life, for the city, and the mart, and the fever of success. So it was well when the holiday was over; and not either of the travelers, we may be sure, would have desired to prolong it.

They came back on a Saturday evening, just one week before the re-opening of St. Hildegard's; so that, for the first time in eighteen months, De Benham found himself in London on Sunday with nothing to do. How he would have enjoyed such liberty five weeks ago! He would, perhaps, have taken his mother to Westminster Abbey in the morning; have dropped in at St. Paul's or the Temple Church in the afternoon; thence have pushed on for a long ramble through Kensington Gardens and the parks, and have come home at dusk, tired and hungry, and happier than a king. But now all was changed. Fine organs, choral services, famous preachers—he cared for none of them. Moody and preoccupied, he spent his morning sorting papers, making out accounts, and tying up his compositions in parcels, dated and indorsed, as if to be laid aside forever. This done, the rest of the day seemed interminable. He wandered in an aimless sort of way about the dreary little streets and squares of the neighborhood. He went with his mother to some dull church close by in the afternoon. He did not care to talk; he could not read, for his thoughts were too busy. He could only count the hours as they went by, and wonder if to-morrow would ever come.

The morrow came, however, and found him at about half past eleven o'clock in Mr. Hardwicke's counting-house, addressing himself to one of Mr. Hardwicke's clerks, and requesting the favor of ten minutes' conversation with the great man himself.

The clerk looked at him doubtfully, suggested that he should see Mr. Knott, the managing clerk, instead, and finally, on being told that he was the organist of St. Hildegard's, consented to take his message.

"Mr. Hardwicke is much occupied," he said, coming back after a few minutes; "but he will see you presently, if you like to wait."

So Temple said he would wait, and did wait for more than half an hour, watching the coming and going of messengers and porters, and listening to the hum of office talk, the rapid scratching of many pens, the busy ticking of the great clock over the door, and the ceaseless reverberation of heavy traffic in the street without. At length he was summoned to Mr. Hardwicke's private room; a room dark and lofty, double-doored, double-windowed, heavily furnished in mahogany and red morocco, after the fashion of Strathellan House, and adorned over the chimney-piece with a stupendous portrait of the late illustrious Alderman Hardwicke in the full panoply of civic robes—that Alderman Hardwicke who, it will be remembered, was Lord Mayor of London, and from whom the beautiful Claudia had inherited no small proportion of her wealth.

Mr. Hardwicke, standing with his back to the fire-place and an open letter in his hand, received the young man with his customary urbane smile, though, at the same time, with his pompous suavity, and a more brief and business-like manner than it was his pleasure to assume when dispensing the hospitality of Strathellan House.

"Good-morning, Mr. Debenham," he said. "I thought you were following Mr. Choake's example, and enjoying your liberty. Mr. Choake is in Switzerland, and St. Hildegard's, they tell me, can scarcely be got ready by next Sunday, after all. You want to know, I suppose, when your duties will begin again."

"I have no such excuse for my intrusion, Sir," replied De Benham. "I come to ask the favor of your advice upon a matter of private business."

Mr. Hardwicke looked grave, anticipating an appeal to his purse, and glanced at the clock on the chimney-piece.

"I can say all that I have to say within the space of five minutes," said De Benham, haughtily, "if you can spare me so much of your time."

The merchant begged his visitor to be seated, and replied, somewhat formally, that he was entirely at Mr. Debenham's service.

De Benham, however, following Mr. Hardwicke's example, remained standing.

"You know me, Sir, as a musician," he said; "but the calling is unremunerative, and I am dissatisfied with my prospects. I have received a liberal education; I have good health; and I am not afraid of hard work. How to get work is my difficulty. I know what I can do; but I do not know what I am fit for."

Mr. Hardwicke's brow cleared. He liked the straightforward way in which the young man stated his case, and he was relieved to find that there was no question of borrowing or lending.

"What can you do, Mr. Debenham?" he said, smiling.

"I can write and speak fluently German, French, and Italian. I have a fair knowledge of Spanish. I know some Greek, and more Latin. I have taken a medal for mathematics. I am a tolerable draughtsman. And I have been a miscellaneous reader upon all kinds of subjects, so that there are few matters of general interest about which I do not know something, in case of need."

"Book-keeping, I presume, is not one of them?"

"No—but I will learn it."

"Of every thing connected with trade—the import and export trade of Great Britain, for instance—you are no doubt entirely ignorant?"

"Of trade, as trade, I am, as you say, entirely ignorant; but I have some leading notion of our own natural and industrial resources, and of those commodities which we receive from abroad."

Mr. Hardwicke referred to his letter.

"It is absurd, of course, to ask the question," he said; "but I have here a letter of advice from Liverpool in which my correspondent mentions a consignment of some article called *chica*—do you know what it is? I have no idea myself, unless, judging by the small quantity reported, it is some kind of a drug."

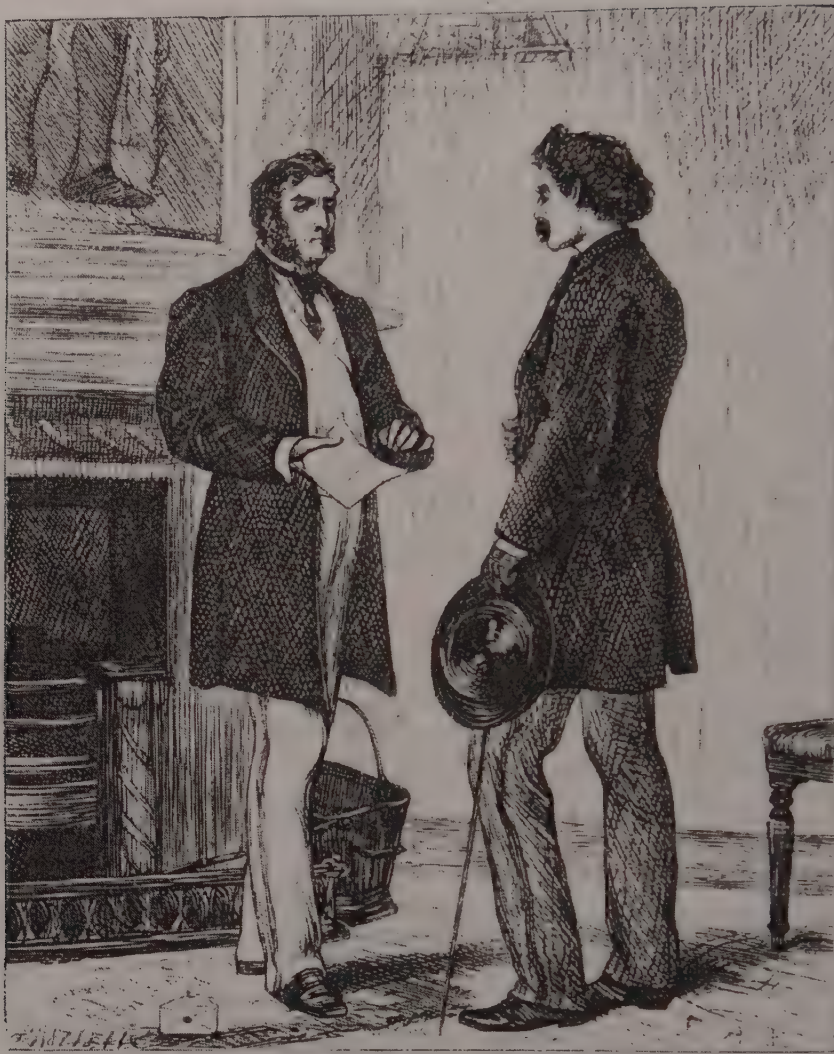
De Benham hesitated. He remembered to have come upon the word long since in some book of travels, but he could not, for the moment, force his memory to bring back the details.

"Where does your consignment come from?" he asked.

"From America."

And then it all flashed upon him.

"It is a pigment," he said, quickly. "It is a red pigment prepared by the Indians of the Orinoco from a plant of the bignonia tribe. They



"MR. HARDWICKE RECEIVED THE YOUNG MAN WITH HIS CUSTOMARY URBANE SMILE."

use it, mixed with alligator fat, to stain their skins."

"You are sure of that, Mr. Debenham?"

"Quite sure. I read it years ago in a German book of travels. I remember it perfectly."

Mr. Hardwicke looked pleased, penciled a marginal note against the word, and put the letter in his pocket-book.

"Many thanks," he said. "Your miscellaneous reading and your good memory, Mr. Debenham, are evidently not without their value. That you are a linguist is also in your favor. A commercial man can not have too many modern languages at his command. It would not be amiss if you were to add Russian, Portuguese, and Romaine to your present stock—the two last would come to you easily enough through your Spanish and Greek."

Then, without giving De Benham time to reply, Mr. Hardwicke opened a drawer in his writing-table, and took out a pile of thin, foreign-looking papers.

"Here," he said, "are two letters from two of my foreign correspondents—Mr. Empedocles

of Athens, and Mr. Villada of Lisbon—the one in Romaine, the other in Portuguese. Can you make any thing of them?"

"I do not doubt that I can read the Portuguese," replied De Benham. "Of the Romaine I am not sure; but I will try."

Saying which, he took the letters over to the window, for the writings were strange and crabbed and the room dark, and there stood, studying them attentively.

In the mean while Mr. Hardwicke drew his chair to the table, opened his desk, and scribbled off a note or two; humming softly to himself the while, and now and then stealing a glance at his visitor. Presently he touched a spring-bell and sent his letters to the post; and once a clerk came in with some message about an invoice; but all this did not occupy more than ten minutes, at the end of which time De Benham said he thought he understood the drift of both the letters.

"Mr. Villada, it seems to me," he said, "regrets that there should have been a mistake in the last shipment, and informs you that a fresh

consignment is already on its way to the port of London. And he adds, that one Mr. Montalba, a friend of his, will take those goods which have been wrongly sent, and remove them at his own expense from your warehouse at any time you may appoint."

Here Mr. Hardwicke, referring to a large ledger-like volume lying beside his desk, nodded approval.

"Quite right, Mr. Debenham," he said. "Quite right. For myself, I don't profess to know any modern language but French; but in this book I keep English abstracts of all foreign letters of importance. Your translation tallies with my clerk's abstract in every particular. Now for Mr. Empedocles."

"I am not sure that I follow the meaning of this writer throughout," replied De Benham. "His abbreviations are puzzling, and his Greek characters very difficult to read. I gather, however, that he introduces his nephew, Mr. Demetrius Michaelis, for whom he entreats your good offices during his visit to London. Mr. Demetrius Michaelis is also, as I understand it, the bearer of a case of choice Santorin wine, of which Mr. Empedocles begs your acceptance. I can not make out the concluding paragraph—it refers to some money transaction".....

Mr. Hardwicke closed the abstract-book, and said, with his most courteous smile:

"Enough, Mr. Debenham—more than enough. That you can deal so well with languages of which you know nothing is ample proof of your facility in dealing with those you profess to understand. Be so good as to favor me with your address. I will bear your wishes in mind, and promote them, if I have the opportunity."

While the young man was yet expressing his thanks and getting out his card, the same clerk who had parleyed with him in the outer office came in, bringing a telegraphic dispatch.

Mr. Hardwicke tore the envelope open and ran his eye rapidly along the lines. De Benham, having placed his card upon the table, took up his hat, made his bow, and moved silently toward the door.

Mr. Hardwicke looked up, frowning and troubled—glanced from De Benham to the telegram, and from the telegram back to De Benham—seemed about to speak—hesitated till the door was just closing between them, and then called his visitor back.

"Stop!" he said. "Another minute, Mr. Debenham."

The young man turned back, with his hand on the door.

"Shut it," said Mr. Hardwicke, impatiently. "Shut it, and come in."

Not quite liking this authoritative tone, De Benham, with a somewhat heightened color, shut the door and came in.

"I have bad news here," said Mr. Hardwicke.

"One of my ships—the *Fairy Queen*, laden with tallow from Odessa—driven out of her course by stress of weather, has stranded somewhere on the southeastern coast of Calabria. Her captain having met with some accident, I do not know of what kind, is lying ill in the nearest village. The boat, unfortunately, is not insured; and I must send some one out at once to look after both captain and cargo. You say you can bear

fatigue, and you speak Italian fluently. Will you go?"

De Benham's heart gave a great leap of exultation; but he put control upon himself, and said, promptly, but quite gravely:

"Yes."

"At once?"

"I can be ready within an hour and a half."

"Good. You can take the next tidal train, which leaves London Bridge at twenty minutes past four—that will allow you more than four hours. You must go straight through to Naples without stopping, and from Naples inquire your quickest way to—what is the name of the place?—Soverato. And, mind, you will spare no expense to save time. Arrived at Soverato, you will at once assume the command. Mackenzie, the first mate (he who telegraphs the news), is an honest, active fellow, and will obey you implicitly: but you will do well to follow his advice in all matters of which he knows more than yourself. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"Your duty, of course, will be to protect the cargo, keep off the natives, resist imposition, and, if possible, get the ship off again. But if you find the damage is too great, charter another vessel, and reship the cargo without loss of time. Do you know any thing about the law of salvage?"

"Nothing."

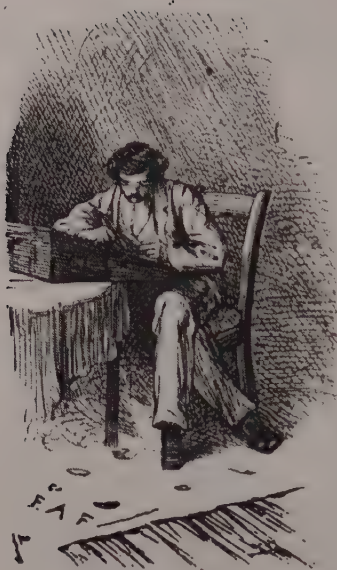
"Then here is Poncet's book—'*Les Principes du Droit Maritime*.' Read it on the journey; it will tell you all you ought to know. And as for Barclay, the captain (an excellent sailor, and a man for whom I have the highest esteem), do all that is possible for him. Perhaps you had better take on a surgeon with you from Naples. The coast on that side is wild and desolate, and I suspect that Soverato is a mere fishing village, destitute of any sort of accommodation, and probably no doctor within reach for twenty miles. Now go; and be back by three o'clock for your credentials. You shall have full written instructions, full powers, and ample credit. For the rest, your success depends upon yourself."

"I will do my best, Sir, not to disappoint you," said De Benham—bowed—and was gone.

Then Mr. Hardwicke drew a deep breath, rose from his seat, and began pacing thoughtfully up and down the room. He was not given to act upon impulse; but he had acted upon impulse now, and his mind misgave him sorely. The young man seemed clever—was clever undoubtedly; not wanting, apparently, in decision of character; self-reliant; ready; straightforward. Still he was untried; untrained; a mere novice in things commercial. It was a risk. Mr. Hardwicke could not conceal from himself that it was a very serious risk; and the more he considered it, the more his mind misgave him.

"I wonder what Knott will say to it," he muttered to himself. "I wonder if I have made a fool of myself."

Mr. Knott, it will be remembered, was Mr. Hardwicke's managing clerk, and Mr. Hardwicke entertained a profound respect for Mr. Knott's opinion; so it was not without some inward trepidation that he wondered what that sagacious henchman would "say to it."



CHAPTER XXV.

BY LAND AND SEA.

SPEEDING along for the first time in his life by first-class express; a handful of bright sovereigns in his purse, and a little packet of letters of credit in his traveling belt; representative, for the nonce, of a great commercial house; and furnished not only with money but authority, De Benham was at first almost bewildered by the change in his position, and the new life into which he had plunged. The time had been so short and his preparations so hurried, that it was not till the train had steamed out of the station and he was fairly on his way that he had time to think at all. And then the whole thing seemed to him more like a dream than a reality. But an hour or two ago, and he was rushing hither and thither, hunting up a substitute to take his duty at St. Hildegarde's, in case the little church should reopen before his return—writing an explanatory letter to Mr. Choake, to be forwarded by his mother in case of need—supplying the deficiencies of his wardrobe at an outfitting house—packing—parting—flying back to the City in a Hansom—receiving his money and credentials, not from Mr. Hardwicke, but from the far more awful hands of Mr. Knott, a stony-visaged veteran with a relentless eye, who glared upon him as if he were a convicted felon, and dismissed him as it might be to the penal settlements—all this but three hours, two hours, half an hour ago, and now—now the new life had begun, and these things belonged already to the past—that past which he seemed to be leaving farther and farther behind with every fleeting mile.

Folkestone already, the impatient steamer panting at the pier, and the dancing sea beyond! Now the fresh breeze and the open deck—the welcome cigar—the delicious summer evening—Boulogne sparkling with innumerable lights, just as the last glow fades out of the sky—the landing-place—the custom-house—the inevitable “portion” of cold chicken and half bottle of *vin ordinaire* at the station—and now the rail again.

By this time it is night. The train, though professedly “*grande vitesse*,” makes but moderate speed, and often stops by the way. Alone in his compartment, De Benham wraps himself in his railway rug, makes a pillow of his traveling bag, and tries to sleep; but in vain. The more he tries, the more hopelessly wide awake he is. At last he gives it up; lights his reading lamp, and devotes himself to a careful study of the continental Bradshaw.

London to Paris, Paris to Marseilles, Marseilles to Naples! Up and down, backward and forward, he performs the traveler's perpetual penance, and with the usual results. Trains do not correspond with each other, and steamers do not correspond with trains. Four hours' delay in Paris; nineteen hours to Marseilles; seven hours' delay at Marseilles; fifty-six hours by the boat—Why, to get to Naples alone will take him ninety-eight hours at the very least, and then he has to find his way across the country to Soverato! Meanwhile the *Fairy Queen* may be slowly going to pieces among the rocks, and her cargo washing out to sea with every tide. The mere thought of this danger comes upon him with so keen a sense of his own utter helplessness, that, stopping now for twenty minutes at Amiens, he is fain to allay his impatience by hurrying up and down the platform till the train goes on again.

It is now past midnight. He is no longer alone in his compartment, and feels less than ever inclined to sleep. Two ecclesiastics—one, apparently, of high rank—are his traveling companions from this point. The dignitary sleeps profoundly all the way, while his subordinate nods over his breviary by the feeble light of the oil lamp overhead. Thus the night wears, and at a little before three they arrive in Paris. On, then, at once through the dark and empty streets to an hotel over against the terminus of the Chemin de Fer de Lyon, where, after much knocking and ringing, a sleepy porter stumbles to the door and lets the traveler in. Here, all dressed as he is, De Benham snatches some two hours of heavy sleep; and then, after breakfast and a bath, is on the road again.

A delicious morning, fresh, and breezy, and joyous; the bare French landscape all open to the sun; the reapers at work in the yellow corn-flats; the oxen at plow in the stubble; the children on their way to school, stopping to shout after the train as it flies by! De Benham is now deep in Pouget's “*Principes*,” beginning conscientiously at page the first; but as the day advances and the sun gains power, the study of maritime law becomes more difficult. Too sleepy to read and too hot to sleep, half choked with dust, and half blinded by the intense glare struck back from earth to sky, he is carried on league after league, hour after hour, by Dijon, and Chalons, and Macon, with flying glimpses of the sleepy Saone and the golden hills of the Burgundian Arcady. Then, about six o'clock, as the heat begins to abate and the shadows lengthen, comes Lyons. Three-quarters of an hour here for refreshment, and so on again southward, to the sea!

Sunset now, gorgeons and glowing—twilight, and “eve's one star”—night, and the crescent moon, and the transparent darkness of a southern sky. The twinkling lights from hill-side vil-

lages and the gleaming river close at hand are so mysteriously picturesque, the time is so peaceful, the air so cool and fragrant, that De Benham would now fain keep awake, and prolong the pleasure of the passing hour. But he can not. The oblivion that would not be courted last night comes upon him at last with resistless power; and, fairly tired out, he sleeps profoundly all the way to Marseilles.

At a little after two in the morning, however, he is roused up, cold and shivering, by the blaze of a lantern and the voice of the guard imperatively demanding his ticket. It seems to him that he has but just left Lyons, and he can not believe that he is already at the end of his journey by land. The keen air, however, comes to him laden with the taste and smell of the sea as soon as he is out of the station; and he sees a forest of masts at the bottom of the street through which he is driven to his hotel.

The seven hours in Marseilles drag by slowly enough, and by nine A.M. he is on board the steamer of the Messageries Impériales, bound for Naples, but touching at Civita Vecchia by the way. This touching at Civita Vecchia is another inevitable delay; which, however, like the rest, must be borne patiently.

And now, breathing the salt air, pacing the deck, and studying Pouget with a will, De Benham finds the time pass less wearily. His fellow-travelers, mostly French and Italian, enjoy themselves immensely; but then they are gay and sociable by nature, and are neither hedged in by an invincible reserve nor oppressed by business cares. The weather, too, is enchanting—the sea scintillating like a diamond, and blue as the bluest sapphire. Toward evening there is music upon deck, and some dancing; and by midnight all the passengers, save one, are gone to their berths for the night. That one, though he has not been regularly to bed for two nights already, is restless, and prefers the deck: Here, falling into conversation with the captain, he hazards an inquiry respecting Soverato, its distance from Naples, and its accessibility by land; but the captain, who has spent his life on the Mediterranean, has never even heard of Soverato. Upon one point, however, he is positive; and that is that his passenger must not attempt to reach the southeastern coast by land. The roads are bad, and the mountains infested with banditti. Besides, there are plenty of Italian steamers plying between Naples and Messina; and by taking one of these as far as Reggio, he can easily hire a small sailing-boat for the rest of the distance. Judging from what De Benham tells him of the position of Soverato on the map, he imagines it may be done, with favorable weather, in about eighteen hours—say, allowing for delays, twenty-four.

Twenty-four hours from Naples, and not yet at Civita Vecchia! Five nights and six days—perhaps longer—and not one hour's avoidable delay! What will Mr. Hardwicke say? What will Mr. Knott say? What is happening, meanwhile, to the *Fairy Queen*?

"Is there no quicker way?" he asks, his anxiety betraying itself in his voice.

The captain shrugs his shoulders, shakes his head, and, with your true Frenchman's dislike to utter an unacceptable truth, says nothing.

"Supposing that I landed at Civita Vecchia

and went on by rail to Naples—should I gain even a few hours, do you suppose?"

Again the captain shakes his head.

"*Mais non*," he replies. "There is but one direct train from Rome to Naples each day; and that train leaves Rome in the morning, and takes all day to crawl to Naples. Besides, when you land at Civita Vecchia, you are still forty-five miles from Rome, and we shall not get into port till the first train has started. You would lose twelve hours, instead of gaining one."

"Then there is no help for it?"

"*Rien que la patience, Monsieur*," replies the captain, with another little shrug.

"*La patience!*" indeed! Is there in our whole vocabulary, French or English, a more irritating word in the ears of an impatient man?

"Monsieur le Capitaine would, perhaps, find it difficult to be patient, if his good boat here were in hourly danger of being wrecked or plundered, and he traveling day and night to her rescue."

"*Ma foi, oui*; but Monsieur puts an extreme case," says the captain, deprecatingly.

"I put my own case," retorts his passenger; and so goes on to relate something of the disasters that have befallen the *Fairy Queen* and her captain.

Hereupon the Frenchman's professional sympathies are at once awakened, and he is as ready and eager with his counsel as if he had a personal interest in ship and cargo. He asks questions, proposes expedients, and has, withal, some valuable suggestions to offer. That the captain of the merchant vessel should be disabled is, in his opinion, the worst feature of the case. An immense responsibility has devolved upon the mate, and to this responsibility he may not be equal. He is probably beset by all kinds of difficulties—want of authority, of money, of experience, of presence of mind. He may find it next to impossible to keep his crew together—to repel intruders—to make himself understood by the natives—to engage proper assistance. For all this Monsieur must be prepared beforehand. By-the-way, has Monsieur communicated with the mate? Does the mate know that Monsieur is on his way? Ah! that has been done by the owners in whose interests Monsieur is traveling. Good; but the mate may all this time be sorely in want of advice—of assistance. Would it not be well if Monsieur were to telegraph from Civita Vecchia to the nearest British Consul—say at Squillace, which can not be very far from Soverato—and request him to give such help and countenance as may be in his power? And what if Monsieur were also to telegraph to the mate, telling him that the British Consul had been summoned to his assistance, and that Monsieur would himself be upon the spot in the course of twenty-four hours? Such a message could do no harm, and might do much good. The man's courage and endurance, for instance, might be giving way; and, *tonnerre de Dieu!* who can say what a timely word of encouragement may not be worth? As for salvage, if any kind of assistance has been rendered by those on shore, Monsieur must hold himself prepared to encounter the most exorbitant claims, and to contest them point by point. Here, again, the British Consul will be his main help and adviser; but he can also appeal, if necessary, to

the *Conciliatore*, or petty magistrate of the commune.

All this, and much more to the same purpose, does the eager little captain of the *Etoile du Nord* pour with untiring volubility into De Benham's attentive ear as they pace the deck in the moonlight. All this the young man seizes upon, acts upon, and turns promptly to account. At Civita Vecchia he telegraphs to the mate at Soverato, and to the British Consul at Squillace; and throughout the rest of the voyage he continues to cultivate the captain, so having a world of valuable information, and learning more of cases of wreck and salvage than he could have acquired in a month from all the books that had ever been written on the law of merchant shipping. Arrived at Naples, they part with hearty thanks on the one side, and many expressions of good-will on the other; and then De Benham, in a strange, noisy, brilliant foreign city, is once again thrown upon his own resources.

In Naples, however, he is destined to stay longer than he had foreseen, and to take quite another route than that suggested by the captain of the *Etoile du Nord*. Being advised thereto by various persons in whom he is bound to have faith (such as Lloyd's agent, and the British vice-consul, and a certain Signor Festa up at the British Library, who is an irrefragable authority in all such matters as maps, routes, guide-books, couriers, and the like), he gives up that scheme of taking the Neapolitan steamer to Reggio and then doubling Cape Spartimento in a sailing boat, and decides, instead, upon landing at a place called La Pizzo, about half-way between Naples and Reggio, and thence posting on across the mountains to the Gulf of Squillace, on the eastern coast, at a point where the two seas are but fifteen miles apart in a direct line. Even by this route, undoubtedly the best and quickest he could take, he finds it impossible to reach Soverato in less than forty-five hours. Arrived at Naples about seven in the evening, he there has to wait twenty-four hours for the boat to La Pizzo; and is fortunate even so, for at this time the Adriatic steamers ply only once a week along that coast. All night long, too impatient to rest, he stays on deck from Naples to La Pizzo. All day long he posts from La Pizzo to Soverato. For, though the main land is but fifteen miles across from sea to sea, as the crow flies, the roads are hilly and circuitous, and double backward and forward in such wise as almost to treble the distance. At length, when all this is done, and his *carrettella* draws up before the doors of the dilapidated albergo and posting-house, situate at the farther extremity of the still more dilapidated village of Soverato, he still finds himself more than two miles from the scene of the *Fairy Queen's* disaster; and so, taking a bare-legged Masaniello in a scarlet cap for his guide, and followed by a troop of ragged urchins, brown and beautiful as little antique bronzes, he goes down to the shore on foot.

It is now just the hottest hour of the hottest day he has ever experienced. Sea and sky are all of one pitiless blaze. The bare volcanic rocks of this wild eastern coast; the long, white, blinding roads over which he has been toiling in an open vehicle for the last seven hours; the very stones and sand under his feet, strike back the

universal glare, and smite upon him like the blast from a furnace.

And now, at about three o'clock in the afternoon of the second day after his arrival at Naples, threading his way down a precipitous path, evidently the bed of a winter torrent, and turning a sudden angle of rock that seems almost to overhang the sea, Temple De Benham sees the ship—the object of all his anxiety, the goal of his long journey—lying over on her beam ends against a steep shelf of rocky beach some forty or fifty feet below, apparently safe and uninjured, looking like a monstrous whale cast up, dead, by the waves.

CHAPTER XXVI

DE BENHAM MAKES HIMSELF MASTER OF THE SITUATION.

THAT splendid, fast-sailing, iron clipper ship, *Fairy Queen*, A A 1, 1000 tons register, Captain James Barclay, presented nothing like the spectacle of wreck and disaster that De Benham had been picturing to himself all these days and nights that he was journeying from London. He had seen her, in his mind's eye, a mere dismantled hulk, fast breaking up, partly submerged, the sea washing over her, and the beach strewn with shattered casks, fragments of broken masts, and *débris* of every description. He found her, on the contrary, high and dry, and to all appearance uninjured. The *Fairy Queen*, however, was not uninjured. She had lost her bowsprit, suffered damage in various places to her yards and rigging, and sustained a severe shock in taking the ground. Still, the damage done was not considerable, and much of it had been already repaired before ever De Benham appeared upon the scene. The real damage, in fact, was that she should be where she was; and the real difficulty would be to get her afloat again. That she should ever have got there at all, seeing in what a narrow cove she lay, and how the mouth of that cove, and all the inaccessible coast beyond and around it for miles on either side, bristled with perils, seemed little short of a miracle.

The worst of the injury done, in truth, was not to the *Fairy Queen*, but to her captain. He, it seemed, had been knocked down by a falling spar just at the moment when the ship grounded, and was now lying between life and death at the house of the parish priest, somewhere on the outskirts of the village. According to Mr. Hardwicke's wish, De Benham had brought an English surgeon with him from Naples; but they found the *medico* from Squillace in close attendance, and Mr. Cooper said at once that Signor Stefani had done all that was possible under the circumstances. The patient was still delirious, though not so violent as he had been; and his skull was fractured in two places. Signor Stefani was not without hope of bringing him through; "aided," as he courteously said, "by the skill and experience of the Signor Cooper." But the Signor Cooper, who was in a hurry to get back to his own patients, managed to turn the whole affair into a mere consultation; and, protesting that he could not leave Captain Barclay in better hands, took advantage of De Ben-

"THE WHOLE VILLAGE TURNED OUT TO MARVEL AT THE STRANGER."



ham's returning *carrettella*, and went his way that same evening.

In the mean while, the whole village turned out to marvel at the stranger who had come all the way from Inghilterra to see after the safety of the *Fairy Queen* and her captain. Stalwart, scowling, bare-legged men in blue shirts, and scarlet caps, and linen drawers rolled up above the knee; mothers with their children clinging to their skirts, and their babies slung upon their backs; young girls and youths, brown and black-

eyed, and full of joyous life, like beautiful bacchantes and fauns; patriarchal old men with beards and tattered cloaks; horrible old women, with scant, disheveled locks and pendent eyebrows, withered, toothless, mumbling, and decrepit—all these, and more, came crowding down upon the narrow beach, clamoring for alms, for employment, for salvage-money, for rewards proportioned to all kinds of imaginary services; and equally ready to fight, quarrel, or steal, upon the smallest provocation.

Mackenzie, the mate, a fiery, curly-headed Scot of about thirty-four or five, hailed De Benham as if he were an ambassador from Jove himself, and denounced the whole Calabrian population as a set of "ill-bluided, skulking, knifing, pilfering deils, whom hanging was too good for." And then he swore at them heartily in broadest Scotch, and shook his fist in their faces; whereupon the men only scowled the more fiercely, and the old women begged the more clamorously, and the girls and boys were more daring than before.

"They've just driven me beside mysel'," said the mate. "It's only been by setting up targets against the rocks, and putting the men to ball practice, that I've kept them off the ship. They'd ha'e strippit the very copper off her bottom, Sir!"

And then he went on to explain how, for the first few days, the inhabitants of every fishing village within the next fifteen or twenty miles had turned out *en masse*, hoping to find the ship a wreck, and eager for plunder; and how, with the exception of bringing down fresh meat and vegetables for sale, all of which had been paid for on the spot, no kind of help or service had been rendered to the ship's crew by those on shore. As the *Fairy Queen* had been cast, so she had lain ever since. The ship's carpenters had been hard at work upon her, refitting masts and yards, stopping leaks, and doing all that was possible, so long as she remained in her present position; but in none of this work had they found it necessary to call in assistance. Every claim, therefore, that might be advanced, whether for salvage, wages, or debt of any kind, was false and extortionate.

As the ship was comparatively uninjured, so also was the cargo. Of nine hundred and thirty-six tons of tallow in the hold, not a dozen tons, in so far as was possible to judge without unlading the vessel, had sustained salt-water damage.

The crew, however, had not proved easy to manage. As the captain of the *Etoile du Nord* had predicted, the temptations of the shore proved stronger than the authority of the first mate, and Mackenzie had found it impossible to keep his younger sailors from straying to the neighboring villages.

"I've been tied to the ship mysel'," said he, "or I'd lugged them out o' the wine shops. But now you're come, Sir, we maun ha'e discipline."

"We *will* have discipline, Mr. Mackenzie," said De Benham.

And though he said it very quietly, the first mate knew that he meant it.

He did mean it, too; though perhaps he felt less securely confident of his own power than he chose to appear. The responsibility was, in truth, enormous; and it was a responsibility that he never fully realized till he came face to face with his work. That work, however, had to be done, and as the first step toward doing it, he proceeded to get rid of the mob.

It was of no use, he told them, to beg, for he would give them nothing. If they had claims, they might send three spokesmen to him at the Albergo del Sole, and he would hear them; but if they could even prove those claims it would be for the British Consul to pay them. He himself had no power to pay away a single grano. And in order that he should listen to them at all,

it was necessary that they should at once disperse to their homes. He was determined, he said, to keep the beach clear. He would have no intruders within a hundred yards of the ship on any side. And then he warned them that an armed patrol was about to be posted round about the ship; that it would be the duty of this patrol to challenge all comers; and that such persons as disregarded the challenge would do so at their own proper peril.

Finding that he spoke their language fluently, they listened to him; and seeing that he said what he had to say in a plain, resolute way, and was not one jot afraid of them, they hung back, cowed and silenced, and then gradually dispersed.

When they were all gone—and De Benham never stirred nor took his eye off them till the last straggler had turned away—he bade Mackenzie call up the crew; asked the name and grade of each sailor; inquired if any were absent without leave; took down the names of two then missing; selected two men for the patrol, and two others to relieve them at the end of the first watch; desired that each man should be armed with revolver and cutlass; and himself traced out the line of their beat, and gave them the watch-word. This done, he left the first mate in command, and went back to Sovorato on foot.

Not to dine, however; not to rest; fasting and fatigued though he was. Before he would admit to himself that he wanted either food or sleep the missing seamen must be found; punished, if necessary; at all events, sent back to their duty.

And he did find them, after repeated inquiries and much wandering to and fro in the village. He found them carousing in a low wine-shop at the bottom of a dark, disreputable alley; and, at the risk, perhaps, of some personal danger, brought them out from the midst of a savage, half-intoxicated company, any one of whom would have been ready with knife or stiletto at a moment's notice. He then saw them out of the village and along part of the road leading to the beach; and so, bidding them go at once to the first mate and report themselves, dismissed them.

Walking slowly back to his inn in the pleasant summer dusk, with the stars coming out one by one overhead, and the fire-flies beginning to flit and sparkle about his path, De Benham could not but be conscious of a pleasant sense of victory. He felt that he had established his authority with the crew; and he almost marveled at his own success in dealing with such a mob as that which had gathered about the ship in honor of his arrival. So far, this was very well indeed. True, the most difficult part of his mission—that part for which he was least fitted by previous experience, and in the performance of which he must rely chiefly upon the help and counsel of others—still remained to be done; but that part which depended on himself alone, that part in which there was even some little spice of danger, and which, for its successful accomplishment, demanded courage, promptitude, a strong will, and some power of endurance, was already achieved.

Thinking these things over, he sat down by-and-by to his solitary dinner, in a bare, white-washed room, looking to the sea. Meagre were the resources and execrable was the *cuisine* of the Albergo del Sole; but, fortunately for De Ben-

ham, that same pleasant sense of victory covered a multitude of culinary sins, and imparted a flavor to the omelet and a body to the thin Gerace wine, to which neither could lay claim on the score of its own individual merit. After dinner, fagged though he was, he went again to the priest's house, to inquire after the sick man; and then back to the inn, to dispatch a letter to his mother, and another to Mr. Hardwicke. The letter to Mr. Hardwicke was by no means short, for it treated of important details; but the letter to his mother took a still longer time to write, and covered many pages. In it he told her all that he had seen and done since leaving Naples. He described the journey across the mountains, sketched the scenery with the touch of an artist, and the people with the pen of a satirist; and was as gay and discursive as though he were neither overwhelmed with anxieties, nor so worn out with fatigue that the pen was almost dropping from his fingers. For he knew that his letters, when he was far away, were to her as the very bread and wine of life, and he would not, for any consideration upon earth, have let her want that bread and wine while it was in his power to give them to her. Nay, he would, if necessary, have sat up half that night to write his letter, and have spent the other half in walking to Squillace and back to post it, sooner than leave her fasting for a single day. And then, having written the longest and most amusing letter he could think of, he staid some time with the paper and pen before him, thinking of Miss Alleyne.

How strange it seemed, sitting there all alone in that wild, far-away Calabrian albergo—sitting there and thinking of her, with hundreds of miles of land and sea between them! How strange to look back upon those three weeks at Cillingford, so near in point of time, yet so distant in the impression they had left upon his memory! It seemed to him as if years had gone by since that day when they went up to the little church among the hills— And now she did not even know where he was! Well, that was not his fault. She had forbidden him to write to her; and if fate had sent him to Australia instead of to Italy, it would have been all the same. Still, in the absence of any positive engagement, she was right. And it was better so. In nine cases out of ten, a long engagement was neither more nor less than a *purgatoire à deux*; and what right had any man to condemn any woman to so weary an ordeal? Clearly none, be his love what it might. Yes, yes, it was undoubtedly better so—especially for Miss Alleyne.

And then the young man shut his eyes, buried his face in his hands, and tried to bring back her image to his mind; for he had no portrait of her—not even a *carte de visite*. But, somehow or another, the sweet face eluded his memory, and would not come for all his trying. He could remember the flash of her eyes when she smiled, or the turn of her head, or any separate feature; but, strive as he would, he could not evoke the gracious picture as a whole. It was like a strange, tormenting puzzle. The pieces were all there; but to put them together defied his utmost skill.

And, trying still to put them together, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PHILISTINES AND FIG-TREES.

DE BENHAM was off the next day to Squillace, a distance of ten miles by the coast. There he waited upon the British consul, and busied himself with inquiries as to the ways and means by which the *Fairy Queen* might be got afloat again. He consulted the harbor-master and several ship-owners and shipping-agents about the chartering of a vessel for the transport of the cargo; but he found no ship-builder in the place, and only a ship-builder could relaunch the *Fairy Queen*. Unsuccessful, therefore, at Squillace, he had no resource but to go to Reggio on the western coast, some eighty or ninety miles distant. Finding himself a mere mark for every kind of extortion at Reggio, he crossed over to Messina. But it seemed to him that, wherever he went, news of his purpose had gone before him. Informed, apparently, of the urgency of the case, Calabrians and Sicilians alike concurred in asking about eight times more than the ordinary tariff for the work he wanted done. Shipping-agents, ship-owners, and ship-builders seemed banded in a conspiracy against him. Referred from one to another, wearied to death with consultations, bargainings, disputes, estimates, obstacles willfully raised, difficulties willfully exaggerated, and repeated journeyings to and fro by land and sea, De Benham was almost driven to despair. He knew now exactly what it would be necessary to do, and he had taken pains to learn what should be the cost of doing it. Thus armed, he fought the ground over inch by inch, first with one contractor, then with another, till at last, thanks to his uncompromising determination to resist imposition, he succeeded.

"You will be glad to know that our worst troubles are well-nigh over," he said, writing to Mr. Hardwicke from the Albergo del Sole, about a fortnight from the time of his first arrival at Soverato. "The *Bella Lucia*, of Messina, is chartered for the work of reshipment, and is even now on her way hither; and I have finally concluded with Paoli, of Reggio, for the refitting and launching of the *Fairy Queen*. He was here nearly all day yesterday with one of his head men, and came in to my terms at last. We signed and sealed before parting. I inclose a copy of both agreements for your perusal.

"The *Bella Lucia* bears a good character in Messina—a mere cargo vessel—one of Paoli's build, by-the-way—not a fast sailer, but in all other respects satisfactory—burden 980 tons—commander, one Alessandro Ciardi, a capital seaman, I am told, and, as Sicilians go, trustworthy. He would fain have backed up his owner in extorting another three hundred ducats for the hire of the ship, if I could have been brought to give it; but he would regard this, probably, as no more than his duty, and an orthodox spoiling of the Philistines.

"Captain Barclay is making rapid progress toward recovery. He left his room yesterday for the first time, and was sitting this morning in the shade of the good padre's fig-tree. I trust that by the time the *Bella Lucia* has taken in her cargo he will be sufficiently recovered to admit of my sending Mackenzie with Ciardi to see all safely delivered at the docks. I think this would, for many reasons, be satisfactory and desirable.

"As soon as the *Bella Lucia* is gone Paoli will set to work without delay. He says the steepness of the beach at this point is much in our favor, and that, had it been a long and gradual incline, as in the neighborhood of Montauro and other places hereabouts, the cost of getting the ship off, laying down stocks, etc., would have been immensely increased.

"Since writing the above, the *Bella Lucia*, I am glad to say, has come in. Ciardi has fortunately found good anchorage in the cove where the *Fairy Queen* is stranded. To-morrow at daybreak we shall begin transferring cargo."

Such, with the addition of certain details, technical and financial, was the letter in which Temple De Benham reported progress to his employer, and which Mr. Hardwicke (with some inward consciousness of relief, but much outward show of foreseen triumph) handed to his managing clerk to read.

"I think, Mr. Knott," he said, leaning back in his chair with a self-complacent smile, "I think you will admit that this is an eminently satisfactory letter. I think you will admit that my confidence in this young man's abilities has not been misplaced. You were of opinion that I had acted rashly in this matter; but even in commerce, Mr. Knott—even in commerce, where, as a rule, so much precaution is necessary—the power of reading character may occasionally be serviceable. I read this young man's character at a glance—at a glance, Mr. Knott."

The managing clerk returned the letter without a word of comment.

"Well? Well?" said Mr. Hardwicke, impatiently.

"I don't like the tone of it," said Mr. Knott.

"The tone of it?" echoed Mr. Hardwicke.

He of the relentless eye shook his head, coughed a dry cough, and solemnly took snuff.

"The tone of it, Sir," he said, "is not commercial. Philistines, indeed! and fig-trees! What call has any young man, writing to his employer on the business of the house, to bring in such topics as Philistines and fig-trees?"

"I am glad you have no greater fault to find with Mr. Debenham than the vivacity of his style," said the merchant, with a twinkle of suppressed amusement in his eye.

Mr. Knott gave utterance to a little snort of scornful indignation.

"Vivacity, Sir!" he ejaculated. "No young man in this young man's position has any right to be vivacious. It's highly objectionable. It's irrelevant. It's—as I said before—it's uncommercial."

And with this expression of opinion Mr. Knott abruptly left the room.

Then Mr. Hardwicke laughed—a little quiet, self-complacent laugh, all to himself—rubbed his hands softly together; folded the letter, and put it away carefully in his desk. That old Knott should disapprove was only to be expected; that old Knott should even be jealous was also likely enough—old Knott, who was nothing if not commercial—old Knott, who, having lived all his life in the one well-worn groove, would fain bring the rest of the world to the test of his own narrow gauge, and recognize no other! Amusing enough, all this—ay, and an additional testimony, if such additional testimony were needed, to young Debenham's merits. Un-

commercial, indeed! Uncommercial, perhaps, in the sense that a pure Californian nugget, as yet unadulterated by baser admixture, as yet unfused in the common mould and filed down to the vulgar standard, is not a legal tender! But then it is pure gold, and ready to be converted into coin of the realm—just as this young man, with his talents, and his energy, and his fine education, had in him the making of fifty such commercial machines as old Timothy Knott!

For if Mr. Hardwicke had ever trembled for the results of his experiment, he now entertained no doubt that his new employé was a treasure—a treasure to be appropriated to his own use, and worked for his own exclusive benefit. And he foresaw so many ways in which the treasure might be turned to good account. There was that affair at St. Petersburg, for instance, given up long since as a bad debt—what if he were to send out this young man, with orders to sift it to the bottom? Why might it not be possible, even now, to recover every farthing? And then, again, that admirable scheme for monopolizing the wool-trade of Lassa—a scheme hitherto impossible of fulfillment, by reason of the laws excluding foreigners from Central Thibet; but now, if confided to a man fluent in languages, fearless of danger, ready in emergencies—

Mr. Hardwicke drew a deep breath, rose from his chair, and began pacing to and fro between the window and the door. Visions of daring enterprise and brilliant success floated before his mind's eye, and he resolved to come to some definite understanding with De Benham as soon as possible. He was, in fact, so charmed with his own perspicacity in having been the discoverer of this same treasure, that he was willing to pay for it liberally.

"I will offer him," said he, half aloud, "three hundred a year. An increasing salary beginning at three hundred a year, or at four, if three don't content him. He'll never refuse that. He knows his own value; but he'll never refuse that!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

PAST AND PRESENT.

A CHANGED and a busy life was Temple De Benham's under the new régime. Mr. Hardwicke continued to regard him as a *rara avis*; and though in so rapidly achieving a position of high trust and favor the young man found himself not wholly unassailed by those minor perils to which the race of *rara aves* are liable in a world of jealous, hungry, fighting, commonplace sparrows, he continued, nevertheless, to soar and prosper even beyond his hopes. That he should be an object of envy and mistrust to those city sparrows in Mr. Hardwicke's employment among whom he had suddenly alighted was only to be expected. But their enmity was of little moment. They could neither injure nor annoy him; for his work was not their work, and his place was not among them. His work, indeed, lay, for the most part, far enough away; and to the sore trial of that one loving heart that had never borne to be parted from him for more than a few hours at a time, his life was

henceforth given up to pursuits that carried him far afield for weeks, and even months, together.

And now that tide which governs the affairs of men seemed to have turned in his favor. He had found an employer who knew how to value him, and who was willing to deal with him liberally. For that first trip to Italy, he received, on his return to England, Mr. Hardwicke's check for one hundred guineas. He had never possessed such a sum, nor even the quarter part of such a sum, in his life; and though he knew that he had earned it well, and that he was not overpaid by it, he could not help marveling at his own riches. One hundred guineas! Yes, the tide *had* turned, and was leading on to fortune!

And yet he had worked hard for his hundred guineas. He had been three months in Calabria, toiling at his task by day and night, and putting into those three months the work of six. Then, having reshipped his cargo to England, and got the *Fairy Queen* off safe, sound, and thoroughly refitted before he left the spot, he succeeded in reaching home just in time to spend his Christmas-day in the little lodging at Canonbury.

A happy Christmas-day for her who had been dwelling all solitary in that obscure, unlovely home all these three weary months, living on his letters and praying for his safe return. Happy, yet not perhaps so happy as those earlier times when he was yet a youth, and all her own; when no sterner stuff leavened the rich enthusiasm of his nature; when his ambition and his genius went hand in hand, and Beethoven and Mozart, Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, and Spohr were the gods of his idolatry. Ah, those old college days! those pleasant winter holidays! those Christmas examinations, each richer in triumph than the last, when he, her darling and her pride, used to come home from the crowded hall, pale and exhausted, but always successful, to lay his prizes in her lap! Then, too, came the joyous 24th of December, when the young men went out to the woods in troops to fetch in the Christmas-trees, coming back at dusk with songs and torches, and laden with winter greenery—her boy among the rest, bringing home a young fir-tree to gladden their one sitting-room with the scent and hues of the forest. And then came Christmas-day, ushered in by early carol singing and much ringing of bells, when mother and son used to go to the choral service at the Grand Duke's Chapel in the morning; and then after church, if it was fine, walk together in the public gardens, to see all the little world of Zollenstrasse in its holiday smartness—the peasants in their picturesque costumes, the officers in their uniforms, the professors in their gowns. How happy, too, were those little un-English Christmas dinners—the chicken and jam sauce, the *braten* that betrayed no flavor of beef, the apple *kuchen*, and the thin red wine, which seemed all the thinner for being spiced and mulled in the stove! And then, when evening came, Temple used to play Handel's Pastoral Symphony, and the soldier's chorus from Beethoven's Mount of Olives; and sometimes they read aloud to each other Milton's Hymn on the Nativity, or a dialogue of Plato, or an act from Shakespeare or Schiller.

Those were the Christmas-days of the past, before the tide had turned. It was different now. The young eager-eyed musician, whose very soul

was in his art, and whose every dream was, as it were, set to music, was gone. Gone—changed—transformed; and in his place there sat this bronzed and bearded man, whose talk was of ships, and seas, and foreign shores, and future enterprises leading on to wealth.

He had much to tell, and she was never weary of listening. Still, proud as she was of his skill and energy, she looked back and sighed, and inly wondered whether any of this world's prizes were worth that Eden of poetry and art upon which her wanderer had turned his back forever? Time was when Lady De Benham had regarded that very art with eyes of doubt and disfavor; but those prejudices had long since worn themselves away. She had lived eleven years in Zollenstrasse since then—Zollenstrasse, that latter Weimar, of which it might almost be said that the cultivation of the fine arts was the religion of the state. Yielding to the influences of the place, she had become reconciled to music as the profession of her darling's choice; but to commerce—alas! not all the gold of Pactolus could reconcile her to this last degradation. That her son, her Temple, the last of the De Benhams, should sell his personal liberty; accept this man's pay; go east, west, north, or south, at this man's bidding; soil his hands with trade and traffic—these things were intolerable to her. She felt them bitterly. She wept over them in secret. She told herself that no end, however desirable, could compensate for such humiliations. But all this she suffered in silence, and therefore suffered the more keenly. Not for the world now would she have advised or expostulated. He chose to do it; deemed it right to do it; would have done it years ago, had she not withheld the secret from him. Lady De Benham never forgot that half-implied reproach. Had her son thought fit to drive a cab, or sweep a crossing, or serve behind a counter, she would have broken her heart sooner than breathe one syllable of remonstrance.

He had not many days to spend in England—less than a week, indeed; and was bound next for St. Petersburg. In the mean while, having a world of work to get through, and being detained in the City by Mr. Hardwicke for several hours each day, he found little time for home. Now Temple De Benham loved his mother so very dearly that this press of occupation, as it kept him from her in the present moment, and as it threatened to keep him from her in the future, grieved him sorely. Till now he had never left her. And she was so solitary when he was away—and he was likely now to be away so often! She had no friends in London—no acquaintances—not a soul to come and sit with her if she was ill. The utmost he could do for her was to subscribe to a library, and beg Archie to go and see her very often in his absence—No; there was one thing more that he might do, if he would. He might give her an acquaintance, a friend, a daughter, in Miss Alleyne. Should he do this? Would it be wise to do it? He asked himself these questions very often, and could by no means answer them to his satisfaction. At last, being a good deal troubled in his mind, he mentioned the subject somewhat vaguely and circuitously to Archibald Blyth.

"You see, Archie," he said, "it's a delightful thing to feel one's self really moving on; but it

has one drawback. I am obliged to leave my mother so much alone."

They had been down together to the docks, and, coming back up Lower Thames Street, had turned in by the front of the Custom-house for a breath of open air and a glimpse of the river.

"Of course she misses you dreadfully," said Archie, not knowing what other reply to make.

"Ay; but that's not all," replied De Benham. "She knows no one except yourself in all London. Not a soul."

"And I am not particularly well worth her knowing," said Archie, ruefully. "However, I can change her books at Mudie's, and all that sort of thing, you know. I'd call upon her every day with pleasure—only I know I should bore her awfully."

"My dear Archie," said De Benham, "you are the best fellow in the world."

And then he paused; for he did not know how to say what was in his mind.

"But she knows Miss Alleyne!" exclaimed Archie, suddenly.

De Benham shook his head.

"No," he said. "I left England, you know, before they came back from Cillingford, and—I've only been home three days myself."

"You don't mean to say you've not seen her yet?"

"I mean to say," said Temple, reddening, "that till now it has been impossible. You seem to forget how my time has been taken up, and how far it is from Canonbury to Kensington."

"That fellow Leander used to swim across the Hellespont," said Archie, with a sidelong glance at his companion.

"But I am going to call there to-day—now, in fact; before going home."

"And won't you introduce them before you go away?"

"I don't know—I scarcely think— You see, Archie, there is no engagement between Miss Alleyne and myself. And I don't want to—precipitate matters."

Archie pursed up his mouth, and uttered a prolonged whistle.

"Which being translated," said he, "means that you have seen somebody else out there in Italy whom you like better."

"It means nothing of the kind," said De Benham, angrily.

"Well, you have changed your mind, perhaps."

"Good heavens, no! I admire Miss Alleyne as much as ever. If I were a rich man I would ask her to marry me to-morrow. But I am not a rich man. I am a very poor man. I must work hard for years before I dare think of marriage. Therefore I hesitate about making Miss Alleyne known to my mother. I—I feel I have no right."

"Then, my dear fellow, don't do it," said Archie, emphatically. "When a man feels he has 'no right' to do the decisive thing in a case of this kind, it generally means that he is not quite sure he cares to have that right."

"If you think I have ceased to love her, Archie, you wrong me," said De Benham, earnestly. "Upon my honor, you wrong me. My feelings are unchanged. She is the only woman I have ever cared for—or ever shall care for."

"I'm not blaming you," said Archie.

"Of course not. Neither should I deserve

your blame. There's not a grain of fickleness in my nature."

And he said this with the utmost sincerity; knowing that he had never given one look or thought to any other, and believing, for the time, that he loved her as much as ever.

"Then I don't understand your scruples," said Archie.

"It may be so many years before I am in a position to marry."

"But your prospects are better than ever."

"My prospects," said De Benham, quickly, "would be ruined if I were to incur the responsibilities of—there, we won't talk of it, Archie. Believe me, I am actuated by a stern necessity. You'll understand it all, some day."

And so it was. In all good faith, he believed in that "stern necessity." It never occurred to him that the necessity was of his own making. He was, indeed, long past that point at which a man is capable of analyzing his own motives, and he had no idea that he was ruled by a passion stronger than love.

As for Archie, he was silenced and puzzled, and knew not what to think.



CHAPTER XXIX.

HAD SHE FORGOTTEN?

THE young men parted company at the Mansion House, where De Benham hailed a Hansom, and desired the driver to take him to Campden Hill, Kensington. For those days were past in which he would walk any number of miles to save a cab-fare, and time had come to be of more value than money.

It was now nearly four months since he had seen Miss Alleyne, and during the whole of that time there had been no communication of any kind between them. This, however, was not his fault. She had forbidden him to write to her, and he had obeyed to the letter. He had told himself again and again, when he was in Calabria, that he was not only blameless in so keeping

silence, but that he was somewhat hardly used in being required to do so. It might have been for twelve months instead of three; it might have been to Australia instead of Italy; he might have fallen sick among strangers, and she would have been none the wiser. Now, however, that he was about to see her for the first time in her own home—for the first time since that morning in the porch at Cillingford when she had promised to wear his ring, and think of him "by day and night" while they were parted—he began to doubt whether he had been quite justified in taking her *au pied de la lettre*. Perhaps, considering the circumstances of his journey, it would have been better had he set that edict aside, and written for once to tell her what had become of him. Yet he well knew that the thought of doing so had occurred to him repeatedly; but always as a thing which it would be wiser to leave undone. In the mean while, what had she thought of his prolonged silence? Had she waited, and watched, and wearied for his coming? Would she receive him with reproaches? Would it all be as if they had parted only yesterday? Or would there be a difference, a restraint, a sense of estrangement?

So absorbed was he in these doubts and questionings, that he found himself rattling through Kensington before he knew that he had passed Hyde Park Corner. It seemed to him that the cabman's horse must have had wings, or that the road had suddenly grown shorter. He stopped the driver at once, however, and said he would walk the rest of the distance. And then he went into a shop and bought a pair of gloves. These gloves took a long time to choose, and a long time to put on; and when they were at last satisfactorily adjusted, he walked very slowly toward Campden Hill. The locality was strange to him, for he had never been further in this direction than Kensington Church. So he went up and down, inquiring his way, but making no especial haste to find it. He felt, indeed, nervous and embarrassed, and had he not come upon the house sooner than he expected, he would have been glad to turn back again for a few moments, to collect his thoughts before going in.

It was a pretty little house, with a long flight of steps leading up to the door, and—although it was winter—flowers in every window. He knocked, and a neat parlor-maid answered the summons. Was Mr. Alleyne at home? Mr. Alleyne was at home; but in his painting-room, and particularly engaged. Was Miss Alleyne at home? No—Miss Alleyne was out.

De Benham had no card to leave—had, indeed, never possessed such a superfluity in his life; but he pencilled his name on the back of somebody else's card, and desired the maid to tell Miss Alleyne that he had been abroad for the last three months, and was leaving England again the day after to-morrow. Then he inquired how they were, and was told that they were both quite well; and so, with a lingering glance at the statuettes and evergreens in the hall, and the vista of conservatory beyond, he departed by the way he had come.

His first feeling, as he turned away, was of relieved embarrassment; his next, of disappointment. Now that she was not to be found, he would have given much to find her. It was surely a hard chance that took her away from

home that one only afternoon when it was in his power to seek her there! A hard, hard chance that took him away from England for the second time without once again listening to the music of her voice—for he loved her! Ay, in spite of all that Archie had said, he certainly loved her. However stern the hand that Fate had laid upon him (for he would call it Fate)—however cruel the sacrifices he might be called upon to make—he was quite sure that he loved her. He dwelt upon this point, indeed, with so much insistence in his own mind, and repeated it to himself so often during that first half-mile of his homeward walk, that it almost seemed as if he needed reassurance from within.

Retracing his steps through a net-work of squares, terraces, and lanes, he emerged presently through a sort of passage upon Kensington Palace Gardens, purposing to walk through the Gardens and the Park as far as the Marble Arch, and thence to take a cab home to Canonbury.

It was now verging toward three o'clock, and the afternoon was growing gray and cold. The Gardens, as he turned in by the broad walk running east and west beside the palace, looked chill and deserted. There were a few pedestrians scattered up and down the main walk between Kensington and Bayswater, and a solitary couple by the pond, feeding ducks; but the children and the boats, the nurses and perambulators, the life-guardsmen and the daily loiterers, were all long since gone. He went up to the pond, and stood there for some time watching that solitary couple and the ducks, in a dreary, discontented way, thinking of many things, but chiefly of the long fight that lay before him, and somewhat also of Miss Alleyne. Was it not almost hopeless? Had he not condemned himself to a life of peril, and privation, and hope deferred? Would the battle ever be won? Or, if won, might it not be that victory would come too late? Of what use to triumph when youth was past, and hair was gray, and the wine of life had lost its flavor? See that pair—they looked poor, but they looked happy. The man's hat was shabby, but the girl's face was bright and loving. A coronet was a fine thing; but supposing that one had to give up the bright face in order to gain it, might not the shabby hat be better worth the wearing?

Tough questions these; hard to solve—hard even to contemplate without solving! De Benham gave them up, and turned away with a sigh. As he did so, he saw a lady coming round by the pond, apparently from the direction of Victoria Gate—a lady dressed in some delicate gray material, jacket and dress alike, the skirt looped up over a crimson petticoat, and a little white and crimson feather in her hat. The blood rushed to his face, and his heart beat quickly. He recognized her at the first glance, long before he could distinguish a feature of her face. It was Miss Alleyne.

And now that she was within a hundred yards of him, what should he do? He had paid his visit—he had left his name and message—he was confident that she had not yet seen him—Should he turn away? Would it not be more prudent to do so? Oh, perversity and inconsistency of man! But a few minutes ago, and he was lamenting the hard fate that took him to her door when she was from home; and now—

Well, now he would not, could not avoid her! He blushed for the cowardly impulse; cleared his brow by an effort; and, with a quick, firm step, hastened to meet her.

When they were within a few yards of each other she looked up—saw him—turned very pale—and stopped. He went up to her with both hands extended.

"Juliet!" he said.

She let him take her hand, but she uttered no word of greeting. He felt and saw that she was trembling.

"I have just been to the house," he went on, hurriedly; "but you were out. I was in despair. I have been in Italy ever since we parted, and I came back only three days ago. I am off to Russia the day after to-morrow. I could not bear to go away again without seeing you. You have not forgotten me?"

She shook her head.

"No," she said, smiling; "I have not forgotten you."

But both the words and the smile seemed to cost her an effort.

"It would have been most unjust if you had," he said; "for I have been thinking of you in all kinds of wild and far-away places. You must have wondered what had become of me?"

"No—we knew you were gone away?"

"How could you know that?"

"We thought we should like to hear you play, so we went down one Sunday to St. Hildegard's—papa and I; and although the organist played very well, I felt quite sure—at least, we both felt quite sure—that—that it was not your touch. And then, when the service was over, papa asked the pew-opener, and she said you were gone abroad."

All this was said hurriedly, but still smilingly—that paleness which had come upon her at first sight of him having given place to a feverish flush.

"I am glad you detected the difference," he said, lowering his voice and bending somewhat toward her. "I am glad that no other succeeded in representing me to you in even so small a matter."

But she drew a little back, and put her hand to her throat, as if she were feeling chilled.

"I should indeed be a poor judge of music if I had not ear enough for that," she said. "But how cold it gets now, after two or three o'clock!"

"Especially just here, with the air coming across the pond. Shall we go down yonder where the trees are?"

"No, it is late; and I am on my way home."

"Then I will see you to the door."

So, Miss Alleyne offering no objection to this arrangement, he turned, and they took the road by which he had just come.

"And all this time," he said, going back to that first stage in the conversation, "you only know that I have been abroad; but you do not know where I have been, or what I have been doing. Would you care to hear the whole story?"

"I should like to hear it very much."

So he told the whole story; and the telling of it lasted till they came almost within sight of the house.

"It must be a great change for you—this stirring, adventurous sort of life," said Miss Alleyne,

when he had done. "I suppose you prefer it to music?"

"I prefer it to a life of hopeless poverty," he replied. "But it is not all excitement; and at first I can not even expect it to be very profitable. Besides, it has its drawbacks. I am obliged, for instance, to be almost constantly away from England—from home—from all that I hold dear."

And here again his voice dropped tenderly, and he pressed closer to her side.

"That is very sad for—Mrs. Debenham."

"It is very sad for me, too," he said. "Very sad, and very solitary. You have no idea of what it is to be alone in such a place as Soverato. I got terribly hipped sometimes, and used to fear that you had all forgotten me."

Miss Alleyne made no answer; but De Benham fancied through the dusk that he saw the color deepen on her cheek.

"You will think of me sometimes when I am in St. Petersburg?" he said, presently. "I should not feel half so lonely, and the distance would not seem half so great, if—if I thought—"

He hesitated—not so much from want of words, as from a feeling that it behooved him not to give rash utterance to such as might come first.

"Will you not come in, Mr. Debenham, and see papa?" said Miss Alleyne.

He felt rebuked and uncomfortable. He understood perfectly that she desired to ignore his meaningless, half-uttered tender speeches.

"I don't like to be called 'Mr. Debenham' by you, Juliet," he said, reproachfully. And then he waited for an answer, or a question; but none came.

"However," he added, with a sigh, "I will not come in. I asked for Mr. Alleyne, and they told me he was engaged. Next time, perhaps, I shall be more fortunate."

"When you come back from St. Petersburg," said Miss Alleyne.

"Yes. But I hope that may be very soon—in three weeks, perhaps, or a month."

"You are going quite at the right time," said Miss Alleyne. "I have heard that Russia should always be visited in winter."

"By people who know how to take care of their noses."

"Surely you are equal to that responsibility, Mr. Debenham," laughed she.

"I really can't say. I fancy it is more difficult to keep one's nose in Russia than to keep one's heart in most other places."

"I have not the slightest doubt that you will succeed in keeping both," said Miss Alleyne, with her hand on the gate. "Then you won't come in? What shall I say for you to papa?"

"That I am sorry not to have had the pleasure of finding him disengaged, and that I hope soon to bring him the latest news from the capital of the Czar."

"I will deliver your message precisely. *Bon voyage!*"

"Good-by—good-by, Juliet," he said, taking her hand between both of his own.

But she drew it quickly away, and ran up the steps, smiling still, and repeating, "*Bon voyage.*"

He waited till she had opened the door with her latch-key, and gone in; and then he turned away, somewhat gloomily, and went back again,

in the direction of Kensington Gardens. Had she forgotten? he asked himself. Had she, indeed, forgotten; or did she only affect to forget? How gay she seemed! how indifferent! And yet she turned pale when they first met. She turned pale, and he was sure she trembled. Was that cheerfulness all unassumed? She was surely thinner than when they parted at Cillingford—thinner, and not, perhaps, quite so pretty.

And then he wished that she had not been so gay, and that she had not smiled so persistently. He would have been better pleased had she been silent, and agitated, and uncomplainingly sad. But she had been nothing of the kind. Granted that she did change color for a moment, she recovered her self-possession immediately. Her voice did not even falter when she wished him good-by. Ah, well!—she would at least not weary after him as his mother wearied after him. She was spared all those apprehensions and sufferings; and it was better so. It was, of course, better so. He felt that he ought, for her sake, to rejoice in the turn that things had taken; and yet it would have been pleasanter to believe that—that she was not heartless. Was she heartless? There he paused. Was it heartlessness, or was it womanly pride? Was it levity? Surely, heartlessness was a terrible thing in a woman, and levity was almost worse. Repose of manner, too, was so charming! His mother's repose of manner was perfect. His mother smiled but seldom, and he had never seen her laugh. How dignified she was—how quiet—how stately—how worthy to wear and grace an ancient coronet! Ah! where should he find any to compare with her? Thinking thus, he went with long strides across the Gardens and the Park, and resolved in his own mind that he was glad he had not introduced Miss Alleyne to Lady De Benham—at all events, for the present.

In the mean while, she had gone smiling into the house, and smiling past the trim parlor-maid upon the stairs, and straight to her own bedroom, where she quietly shut herself in and bolted the door. And then she laid aside her hat and gloves, and stood for a long time looking down at the little heart-shaped ring that Temple De Benham had placed upon her finger that happy, happy morning at Cillingford, only four short months ago. Then she took it off, and kissed it, and still looking at it wistfully, wrapped it in silver paper, and locked it away in her dressing-case. This done, she laid herself down upon her bed, and covered her face with her hands, and sobbed bitterly.

Had she forgotten?

CHAPTER XXX.

BROTHER AND SISTER AT HOME.

ON the morning of the sixth day after his return to England Temple De Benham was on the road to St. Petersburg, where it was his mission to recover a long-standing and almost hopeless debt of fifty thousand rubles; the debtor thereof being a certain great Lithuanian prince, who was reported to have creditors *en masse* in every European capital; and who (fenced round by special privileges and immunities) was wont to boast that he had committed every folly under

the sun—except that of paying one single kopeck that he owed. Now this was an avowedly bad case, and if De Benham had come back at the end of a fortnight or so utterly routed, it would have been no more than Mr. Hardwicke expected. But when the young man telegraphed to the effect that, finding all other means ineffectual, he had carried his case before the British envoy; that through official channels he had caused a petition to be conveyed to the emperor's own hand; and that within three days the recalcitrant prince's own steward had waited upon him at his hotel and paid up every farthing of the fifty thousand rubles—then was Mr. Hardwicke more than ever triumphant over Mr. Timothy Knott, and more than ever convinced that he had in truth lighted upon a *rara avis* in Temple De Benham.

"Music, indeed!" he said. "The idea of a man of young Debenham's powers of mind throwing himself away upon music! You remember him, Claudia? He came to one of our parties last year to play the piano. Archie's friend, you know—the organist at St. Hildegard's—pale young fellow—very peculiar looking—splendid head."

To which Miss Hardwicke, without lifting her eyes from her book—it was after coffee one evening at Strathellan House, when the brother and sister were alone—replied somewhat abstractedly:

"Yes—I remember we had the organist to play. I did not observe his appearance."

"He is a remarkable young man," pursued Mr. Hardwicke; "highly educated—speaks six or seven languages—full of energy and resource—born to be successful—the sort of stuff that your Raleighs and Columbuses, your daring soldiers of fortune and bold discoverers, were made of."

"He played very well," said Claudia, with supreme indifference.

"He will make a fortune some day," said Mr. Hardwicke. "He means to make a fortune. He told me as much."

Miss Hardwicke laid her book aside, with a faint, disdainful smile.

"A noble ambition!" she said.

The merchant looked grave. To despise wealth formed no part of his creed.

"It is a very respectable ambition," he replied, pompously. "Very respectable, and very praiseworthy. It is an ambition that the Hardwicks have cherished for—for generations."

"Say, for three—our genealogical tree being somewhat stunted."

"You have been rich all your life, Claudia," pursued Mr. Hardwicke, coloring slightly at the interruption. "You have never known what it is to work, and you have never known what it is to be poor. Therefore you despise industry, and you undervalue wealth. It indicates—forgive me for saying so—a defect of judgment on your part. And I have the highest respect for your judgment, as you know."

"And this moral lecture, my dear Josiah, is all *à propos* of your piano-playing hero?"

Mr. Hardwicke could not restrain a gesture of impatience.

"You are in one of your severe moods to-night, Claudia," he said.

And then there was a pause, during which the twin giants came in with tea. This they hand-



"YOU HAVE BEEN RICH ALL YOUR LIFE, CLAUDIA," PURSUED MR. HARDWICKE."

ed upon silver trays with as much pomp and circumstance as if the Lord Mayor and the whole court of aldermen had been there to partake of it.

When they were gone, Mr. Hardwicke, with some folding and unfolding of his evening paper, and a little preliminary cough, hazarded another observation.

"I saw Lord Stockbridge's card," he said, "in the hall."

Miss Hardwicke had resumed her book, and again answered without looking up.

"Yes—he called to-day."

"And you were out?"

She bent her head affirmatively.

"That was unfortunate."

"Really?" she said, with a slight lifting of the eyebrows, but still with no uplifting of the eyes.

"I do not see why."

Mr. Hardwicke, discomfited again, retired behind his paper.

This time, a still longer pause ensued.

"I think," he said, at length, "as Lord Stockbridge has called, we might venture to ask him to dinner."

"Venture?" echoed the lady, haughtily.

"Yes—do you object to the word? A plain city merchant who invites to his table a man of Lord Stockbridge's rank—"

He stopped, suddenly silenced by the look with which she turned upon him.

"Lord Stockbridge," she said, "is no demigod. He is in debt. His estates are mortgaged,

And his past life, from what I have heard, seems to have been little better than the life of an adventurer."

"I know nothing about his past life," replied the merchant, with some spirit. "He has probably been poor; for he comes of a younger branch, and has only lately succeeded to the title. But he is every inch a gentleman."

"Yes, he is gentlemanly; and I suppose no worse than others who have lived beyond their means," said Miss Hardwicke, as if weary of the subject; "but I should certainly not feel disposed to bow down before him, as if he were a superior being."

"I am not aware that any one ever dreamed of him as a superior being, or had any idea of bowing down before him! It is certainly no act of homage to ask a man to dinner."

"Ask him, by all means."

"And as for aristocratic tastes and tendencies, your tastes and tendencies, Claudia, are far more aristocratic than mine. I am not overfond of City society myself; but you abhor it, and, if I may be permitted to say so, you sometimes show your abhorrence very openly. Yet you seem sometimes as if peers and bishops were not good enough for you."

Mr. Hardwicke spoke with warmth, for his sister had dealt hardly by him the whole evening, and he felt aggrieved—in this last matter especially so; for, in proposing to invite Lord Stockbridge, he had laid himself out, as the phrase is, to please her.

But Miss Hardwicke only smiled; and her smile, somehow, was not as pleasant as it might have been—by reason, perhaps, of a certain curve about the beautiful upper lip.

"I believe I dislike all society," she said. "And I am not sure that peers and bishops are much less tiresome than aldermen and aldermen's wives. We must make it a large party, I suppose?"

"Yes—large; but very choice: Eighteen, I should say, besides ourselves."

"Eighteen very choice people, and Parliament not yet sitting! That will be difficult."

"I don't know. We should give three weeks' notice; and by that time the session will have begun. Sir John and Lady Dawkins are in town: Sir John called upon me this morning at the office."

"Sir John is only a K.C.B.; and his wife is a half-caste."

"Still, they will do. And there's Cromarty of the Home Office, and the Bishop of Patagonia."

"Colonial. An English bishop would be better."

"But he talks so well, Claudia. Besides, we know only one English bishop—"

"True; and he lives more than two hundred miles away. The Bishop of Patagonia will pass."

"Sir Frederick Howe?"

"A physician!"

"Ay; but a baronet, and a man of science."

"Well, if we ask Sir Frederick Howe, we must on no account have Colonel Calderon. The Geological Society is enough, without the Geographical."

"Sir Solomon and Lady Bradfoot?"

"Impossible. Once introduce the aldermanic element, and the *prestige* of the whole thing is gone."

"You know that he is returned for Swindleborough?"

"Yes; but I also know that her father was a tailor. No—Sir Solomon might pass; but Lady Bradfoot is simply unpresentable."

And so they discussed the list of their acquaintances till the great ormolu time-piece struck eleven, and then Miss Hardwicke rose to say good-night. Her brother, always scrupulously courteous, rose to light her candle and open the door.

"By-the-way," he said, "I expect young Debenham back from St. Petersburg to-morrow. I think we must make a little dinner for him, and Timothy Knott, and one or two City men, before long."

Miss Hardwicke looked surprised and annoyed.

"Is that necessary?" she said, coldly.

"Not 'necessary,' perhaps; but, as a matter of business, desirable."

"Against a matter of business I have, of course, nothing to urge."

"Are you engaged for next Monday week?"

"I think not."

"Then shall we fix it? We can ask Archie Blyth at the same time."

"As you please, and when you please."

"Thanks, my dear Claudia. Good-night."

Saying which, Mr. Hardwicke, as was his nightly wont, touched with his lips her half-averted cheek, and betook himself to his library and his nocturnal cigar.

Temple De Benham did arrive in London next day, direct from St. Petersburg; and Mr. and Miss Hardwicke did accordingly request, by letter, in all due form, the pleasure of his company to dinner at Strathellan House upon the evening of the day agreed upon. But, to their unqualified surprise, he declined the invitation.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RISING OF THE TIDE.

THE old year had not yet expired when De Benham left England for St. Petersburg; the new year was verging toward the close of its second month when he came back. And this new year was the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and sixty-one. For him it was the newest of all new years that he had yet known—the first year of an utterly new life. He entered upon it as a voyager entering upon unexplored seas. He entered upon it with new aims, new prospects, new ambitions. He entered upon it having, as it were, formally dissolved partnership with the past, and pledged himself to the future. He felt that he dared not look back, for it seemed to him as if Youth, and Love, and Poetry, and Art were all dead with that dead old year, and buried in its grave. No; he must look back nevermore. He must set his face, now, to the unknown future, let that forward path lead whither it might.

A portentous new year, this 1861, could one have foreseen all that it was destined to bring forth! A new year not only fraught with the fortunes of Temple De Benham, but big with the fates of nations, and sacred to the liberties of millions! Already, in this very month of February, while our traveler was yet in St. Petersburg, the Emperor of all the Russias had decreed the total emancipation of the serfs throughout the length and breadth of his vast dominions. Already Francis of Naples had retired to Rome, and Victor Emanuel had been proclaimed King of Italy. Already, too, had begun that mighty and protracted struggle between the Northern and Southern States of the American Union, which was destined ere its close to wash the stain of slavery from the annals of the New World. The secession of the six slave-holding States was now an accomplished fact; President Davis had been inaugurated at Montgomery; and rumors of a great war were already in the air.

Temple De Benham was now definitively enrolled in Mr. Hardwicke's service, declining, however, to be bound by any kind of annual contract. He would not, he said, dispose of his liberty, or accept a fixed salary upon any terms, however liberal. And yet Mr. Hardwicke tempted him sorely, bidding as high as six hundred pounds a year for his permanent services. Now, six hundred pounds a year was a comfortable income—an income upon which a man might venture to marry, and rent a house, and hope to live with some amount of ease, and even of modest luxury. But he told himself it was not a comfortable income that he needed; it was capital. Were he now to accept six hundred pounds a year, with even the probability of a gradual increase to eight hundred or a thousand, he must hope for nothing more and nothing better, be the years of his life

as many as they might. Not thus could his vow be accomplished. Not thus might he hope to rebuild the home and win back the lands of his fathers. Such paltry savings as he might succeed in scraping together from an income of six hundred pounds a year would be but as drops of water compared with the Pactolus of his dreams. No; what he must have now was freedom to watch for, and seize upon, such chances as might present themselves. Stirring times were at hand. Great questions were even now fermenting in men's minds; great interests were trembling in the balance; great changes were preparing on every side. Already he foresaw, though vaguely, what opportunities might be his, if only he were patient to wait, and proof against present temptation. Surely, he thought, now that the tide had really turned, he should be mad to accept any service that would not leave him free to take that tide at the flood when the precious moment came and the waters were at their highest! So he declined Mr. Hardwicke's offer of a salary, as he had declined his invitation to dinner; whereupon Mr. Timothy Knott confidently asserted that he was mad. Mr. Timothy Knott's employer, however, was by no means of that opinion. He recognized in De Benham's decision only another evidence of self-reliance; and so valued, and coveted, and respected him the more. In the mean while, the young man went hither and thither, transacting such work as Mr. Hardwicke put before him, earning money easily and pleasantly enough, watching the progress of events, and biding his time.

And now the great theatre of action was America. Day by day, week by week, all Europe watched the gathering of the storm, and listened breathlessly to the first mutterings of the thunder. The month of March was rife with evil portents. President Lincoln refused to receive the commissioners from the seceding States; and President Davis, in announcing his intention of preparing for war, demanded a levy of one hundred thousand men. In April, the war began. Fort Sumter, then held for the Union by Major Anderson, was taken by the Confederate troops. President Lincoln called upon the Northern States for a contingent force of seventy-five thousand men. President Davis issued letters of marque, and so let loose a swarm of daring privateers. At Harper's Ferry and Norfolk Navy-yard, the officers of the United States Arsenal, being hard pressed by the Confederate troops, sunk and burned their stores and ships of war. And President Lincoln proclaimed the blockade of the whole line of Southern coast from Virginia to Texas.

And now the nations stood by and beheld this sad and terrible spectacle of a great brotherhood suddenly split asunder; both sides preparing in fierce haste for the deadliest of struggles; their strength turned against each other, and their love transformed to bitter hate—a desperate tragedy played on a mighty stage, with all the world for audience.

Nor was this audience, though individually passive, affected only through its sympathies with those in the arena. The interests and prosperity of tens of thousands—nay, of millions—in England alone, were periled by the conflict. The supply of cotton had suddenly ceased. At the mouth of every port along the

shores of the cotton-growing States there now lay, armed and vigilant, the war-steamers of the Union. The cotton crop might blossom, and ripen, and be gathered in; but the North had decreed that the great trade of the South should be paralyzed; that the planter should not sell, and the stranger should not buy, and that no foreign gold should find its way to the treasury of the secessionist government.

But in the mean while there were between four and five millions of British subjects to whom Cotton was Bread. There were ship-owners and seamen, who brought the raw material from America to England; merchants, warehousemen, dock-owners, and dealers at Liverpool, to receive it; spinners, weavers, bleachers, calenderers, dyers, and printers all over Lancashire and the north, to convert it into fabrics for the public use; engine-makers, machinists, factory builders, export shippers of yarn and manufactured goods, petty traders, workmen, and extraneous hangers-on of every description who found their occupation either suddenly gone, or threatened with a destruction which was none the less certain because it was not immediate.

And now those who had store of cotton laid up in Liverpool warehouses held it back, anticipating great profits to come; mill-owners, foreseeing the time when that store should be exhausted, were already putting their men on "short time" work; newspaper writers were urging the merchants, by every consideration of patriotism and interest, to sell none of their reserve supply to North American or Continental buyers, but to keep it all for home consumption; speculators and statesmen were busy with projects for stimulating the cotton trade of India, Egypt, and Brazil, and for fostering it in all kinds of new districts—in Liberia, Persia, Jamaica, Sierra Leone, Natal, Queensland, the Gold Coast, the Cape of Good Hope, and even the Feejee and Hawaii islands.

And all this time prices were going up, work was getting slack, wages were on the decline, and a great dread and trouble filled the public mind. The season of distress had not yet come; but that it must come ere long none dared to doubt. The rich foresaw ruin; the poor, hunger and cold, and the diseases born of privation. Even Mr. Hardwicke looked grave, well knowing that any great commercial panic, though it might concern a trade with which he had no important relations, must affect him indirectly in many ways.

But Temple De Benham, watching only the rising of that tide on which his hopes were staked, knew now that the flood was at hand, and that his time was come.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. HARDWICKE'S TEMPTATION.

"If you are willing to take the risk, I am willing to take the danger."

"It is a bold proposition," said Mr. Hardwicke, thoughtfully.

And then there was an interval of silence, which De Benham was the first to break.

"It is a bold proposition," he said, "coming, as it does, from a man who has nothing to lose

—who is not even a seaman. I can not wonder if you decline it."

"Supposing I decline it," said Mr. Hardwicke, "what will you do?"

"Find some one else to undertake it," replied De Benham, promptly.

Mr. Hardwicke looked grave; for here was the unwelcome possibility that he had foreseen and tried to guard against from the first. It was out of the question that he should let this young man transfer his talents to the service of another employer. Having once found his *rara avis*, he could by no means endure to part from it. If, now, he had but succeeded in clipping the wings of that *rara avis*—but, alas! the creature knew too well the value of his own powers of volition, and would not submit to the clipping for even so high a bribe as six hundred pounds a year. Mr. Hardwicke shook his head.

"No, no," he said, "that must not be. We won't part, Mr. Debenham, if we can help it."

"It is not my wish, Sir," said De Benham.

"Let us consider what you would require for this enterprise. In the first place, a ship—"

"A steamer," interposed De Benham. "A steamer built for speed."

"Well, a fast steamer, then—a resolute and capable commander—and a crew proportioned to the size of the boat. What more?"

"A cargo."

"A cargo, of course—consisting of Manchester goods."

"Manchester goods, blankets, shoes, hats, small-arms, and ammunition."

"I can not say that I approve of the small-arms and ammunition," said Mr. Hardwicke, uneasily.

"They will fetch almost their weight in gold."

"But they would increase the risk."

"Not in the least. The risk can not be increased. If we are captured—why, we are captured; and steamer and cargo are alike confiscated. Whether we carry milk for babes, in the shape of Manchester goods, or strong meat for men, in the shape of rifles and revolvers, no worse fate can befall us."

"You speak lightly enough of the chances of capture," said the merchant, looking infinitely perplexed, tempted, and troubled. "But the loss, in such case, would be enormous—fifty thousand pounds, at the least."

"Pardon me—I admit the magnitude of the risk. I should not dream of advising you to embark in it."

"Still, you think the thing is practicable?"

"I am sure that it is practicable. I know that it has already been done. I have certain information of a small tug steamer—a mere tub of a boat, scarcely sea-worthy—that ran into Charleston from Nassau on the eighteenth of last month. There will be scores of such boats out in the course of the summer and autumn; but the faster they multiply the more stringent will the blockade become."

"And you think those will risk least who are first in the field?"

"Undoubtedly. The blockading war-vessels are as yet new to the work; but their vigilance will get sharpened with practice."

"Cotton has gone up to one and sixpence a pound in Liverpool," said Mr. Hardwicke, biting the end of his pen.

"It will stand at two and sixpence before twelve months are past," said De Benham.

And then again there was a pause.

"There is this Morrill tariff, too, hampering all our operations on the Canadian frontier," resumed the merchant.

"Yes; there is not much to be done just at present on the other side of the Atlantic."

"It would be cheaper than ever, now that the market is closed upon them," mused Mr. Hardwicke.

"From twopence to threepence a pound at Charleston or Wilmington," replied De Benham, knowing that the merchant's thoughts had gone back to the cotton question.

Mr. Hardwicke dipped his pen in the ink, and jotted down a little column of figures in the corner of his blotting-pad.

"Take the average American bale at four hundred and eighty pounds," said he, half aloud; "then fifteen hundred bales would make seven hundred and twenty thousand pounds of raw cotton. And seven hundred and twenty thousand pounds of raw cotton at—say, threepence the pound, would represent an outlay of nine thousand pounds. Now supposing it sold again at—at two and threepence the pound, the lot would fetch—humph! eighty-one thousand."

"Leaving seventy-two thousand pounds sterling for expenses and profits," added De Benham. "Not a bad speculation, Mr. Hardwicke. Besides, there are the profits on the exported cargo to be considered as well."

"Still, there is the risk."

"Yes; there is always the risk. It is gambling on a gigantic scale, no doubt."

"And I have never gambled."

"Then let no representation of mine lead you to begin it."

Mr. Hardwicke sighed, and bit his pen again, and altered some of the figures in the corner of the blotting-pad.

"Increase the cargo to two thousand bales, and the profits would amount to over ninety thousand pounds," said he, with a somewhat heightened color. "And I know at this moment of an iron steamer—a first-rate boat—for sale or hire—three hundred and fifty horse-power—capable of carrying two thousand bales at the least— Mr. Debenham, you tempt me sorely!"

"No, Sir, I do not tempt you," said De Benham, in a gravely decisive tone. "I submit my project to you, believing it to be both practicable and profitable. I even conceive that it is my duty to do so. But I neither tempt nor persuade you."

"And your own share in this enterprise, Mr. Debenham?"

"Fifteen per cent. upon the profits."

"The risk being entirely mine."

"Not so. I risk my personal liberty. I become, if captured, a prisoner of war."

"Humph! I don't know what to say to it. I must talk it over with Mr. Knott."

"By all means," said De Benham, rising and taking his hat. "When may I expect your decision?"

"You have not named your idea to any other capitalist, I conclude?"

"To none at present, except yourself."

"And you will not do so, of course, while the matter remains in abeyance?"



"AND THEN THEY SAT DOWN WITH A PLAN OF CHARLESTON HARBOR BETWEEN THEM."

"That must depend on how long you take to consider it, Mr. Hardwicke. I am confident that the matter should be taken up promptly, if at all. Can I have your answer to-morrow, at this hour?"

So Mr. Hardwicke promised his answer the next day at that hour, and De Benham withdrew, tolerably confident beforehand as to the decision that answer would convey.

He then plunged into a variety of crowded city thoroughfares, and presently hailing a cab, de-

sired the driver to take him to a certain private hotel in Dover Street, Piccadilly. Inquiring here for Mr. Heneage, he was shown into a room where sat a sallow, sickly-looking man at a table covered with maps and papers. This man's name was not Heneage. He was a native of South Carolina, a wealthy planter, a man of high official position in and about Charleston; and he was lying *perdu* in this quiet Piccadilly hostelry, dreading discovery by the Vigilance Committee of the North, and waiting an opportunity to get

home by any route, however circuitous, and at any cost, however heavy. De Benham and he were mere chance acquaintances. They had met daily, a few months back, at the *table d'hôte* of an hotel in St. Petersburg—met, and conversed, and parted with that sort of mutual liking that is so pleasant to take up, so easy to lay down, and yet might become friendship, if it had time to ripen.

And now, but a day or two ago, they had met again—run against each other, as it were—in a little by-street near the docks, where De Benham had frequent business. And then they had greeted each other and talked freely of many things, the Southern gentleman telling how he was waiting under an assumed name for the first chance of a passage out, and De Benham, eager for information on the subject then uppermost in his mind, confiding to him by degrees his project of running the blockade. So now they were allies, bound together by a strong common interest; and De Benham, had he searched all Europe for the purpose, could scarcely have found an ally in every way so valuable.

Mr. Heneage looked up from his maps, rose, and grasped his visitor by the hand.

"Well?" he said, eagerly.

"Well, I hope by this time to-morrow that I may be able to promise you a passage," replied De Benham.

"I will give you a thousand pounds for it," said the Southerner. "Half down, before we start."

"Give me your advice, and all the information you can think of that is likely to help me. We will settle the rest hereafter."

And then they sat down with a plan of Charleston Harbor between them, and Mr. Heneage pointed out the probable position of the blockading ships; explained all about the lights and the bar; and went over the names of the different beacons—Lawford Beacon, Morris Beacon, Charleston Beacon, and the rest.

"Not in vain have I for the last fifteen years owned the fastest yacht in Charleston Harbor," said he, laughing. "There is not a pilot along the whole line of coast who is more familiar than myself with every shoal, and current, and sounding of that difficult estuary."

"What good fortune for me to have you as a passenger!" said De Benham.

"Heaven grant that your capitalist may not become faint-hearted on reflection!" sighed the exile.

Now it is quite possible that Mr. Hardwicke might have become faint-hearted, had he taken counsel only with himself. But he chose to "talk the matter over" with Mr. Timothy Knott, and that excellent man betrayed so much righteous horror at the proposition, and opposed it so vehemently, that Mr. Hardwicke at once made up his mind to undertake it. His courage needed some little spur before so bold a leap, and Mr. Timothy Knott was obliging enough to furnish that gentle stimulus at the right moment.

if each drop were a glowing sapphire; the sea-birds skirling round and about on rapid wing; the sky already one blaze of sunlight—when that excellent, English-built, double-screw steamer, the *Stormy Petrel*, Captain Frank Hay, from Liverpool, steams into the port of Nassau, having made the run out in the short space of thirteen days and eleven hours from the moment of lifting anchor at Birkenhead. The history of the *Stormy Petrel* may be told, and her portrait sketched, in a few lines.

Built for Messrs. Bodger and Twelvetreves of Leadenhall Street, and originally known to the commercial world by the less euphonious name of the *Molly Carew*, this boat had, for some five years past, plied as a merchant steamer between Liverpool and Mauritius. She was an iron boat, trim and graceful enough, of 1070 tons burden, and 350 horse-power. Her length was 279 feet; her breadth of beam, 35 feet; her ordinary rate of speed, thirteen and a half knots (*i. e.*, fifteen miles) an hour. She drew eleven feet of water when loaded, and six feet four inches when unloaded; and her consumption of coal at half-speed was just twenty tons in twenty-four hours. At her fullest speed she consumed about thirty. She carried coal for twelve days. Such was the *Molly Carew*; such, with certain novel peculiarities lately superadded, is the *Stormy Petrel*.

For the *Molly Carew* has changed owners, been rechristened, and, with a view to the new class of work in which she is now about to be employed, has undergone sundry alterations and repairs. Her speed is now increased to fifteen and a half knots an hour. She used to carry passengers and "an experienced surgeon," but now her cabin accommodation is of the scantiest, every spare inch of space below decks being given up for the stowage of cargo, and every thing above deck being cleared away so as to bring down the visible proportions of the *Stormy Petrel* to the lowest minimum. Her coal-bunkers, by means of an ingenious contrivance originated by De Benham himself, are disposed in the form of upright recesses lining the hull on either side of the waist of the vessel; *thus, as it were, armor-plating with coal that important part where the engines are placed.* Her spars are reduced to a light pair of lower masts with only a "crow's-nest" on the foremast for the watch, and no cross yards whatever. Her boats are lowered to the level of the gunwales. Her funnel, of the "telescope" kind, lies low and raking aft. And her hull is painted of a dull, bluish, sea-green hue, which even by daylight is scarcely distinguishable from that of the waves, and by night, or in the lightest fog, is wholly invisible. The *Stormy Petrel*, it should be added, burns only anthracite coal, which yields neither smoke nor sparks; and her engines are so constructed that, in case of a sudden stop, the steam can be blown off noiselessly under water.

Such are the outward lineaments and characteristics of the vessel which steams into Nassau Harbor this glorious, early morning in the month of June, 1861, seeking fresh coal and a pilot; and a more stealthy-looking craft, or one more closely adapted to thread the perilous ways of a blockaded coast, never dropped anchor in that wild far-away British port. For the *Stormy Petrel* is bound for Charleston, having on board an assorted cargo of Manchester goods, ready-

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE "STORMY PETREL."

It is about three hours after daybreak—a light breeze coming and going; the water sparkling, flashing, breaking into ripples that scintillate as

made clothing, and munitions of war; and this is her first trip in the character of a blockade-runner.

Not the boat alone, however, but her captain and crew are alike new to the work. Indeed, the work in itself is new. Blockade-running, so soon to develop into an organized system, has as yet scarcely begun; and the *Stormy Petrel* is the first well-appointed boat in the field. But her commander has been accustomed to the navigation of these waters before ever the war was dreamed of on either side, and knows the whole coast and all the West India isles by heart. He is a West of England man—a born sailor—short, active, hairy, broad-shouldered, taciturn, cross-grained, fearless as a lion, and about forty-four years of age. This officer, with three mates, a chief engineer, two assistant engineers, eight firemen, six seamen, supercargo, and one passenger, are all the souls on board.

That passenger (who puts up, by-the-way, with a mattress and rug in the supercargo's cabin, and enjoys none of the usual passengers' comforts) is a certain ex-Senator, magistrate, and planter of South Carolina, now stealing home to Charleston under the assumed name of Heneage. That supercargo (charged with the care and sale of the present cargo, and with the purchase of as much raw cotton as the boat can carry back from Charleston to Nassau) is Temple De Benham.

And now the *Stormy Petrel* anchors, for the nonce, not far from the light-house at the mouth of the harbor, keeping well away from the quays, which, however, are soon alive with spectators. De Benham hangs over the ship's side, sweeping the shore with his glass—that low-lying palm-fringed shore, with its stunted shrubs, white-washed houses, and dazzling coral-sands all ablaze in the sunshine—watching the little silver-fish that keep perpetually leaping and springing along the surface of the water; inhaling the soft and perfumed air; and reveling in this his first glimpse of the New World. The captain at once dispatches his first mate to the town to purchase fuel, but permits none others of his crew to go on shore. The *Stormy Petrel*, however, is soon beset by a swarm of small boats filled with free niggers of both sexes, clamorous, grinning, importunate, who offer bananas, alligator-pears, pine-apples, cocoa-nuts, shaddocks, and other tropical fruits for sale. Toward mid-day the *Stormy Petrel* is brought in closer to the shore, and moored alongside a private wharf, so as more conveniently to take the coal on board.

The crowd upon the quays, though constantly shifting and changing, continues, meanwhile, to increase. Here are sailors, soldiers, English officers wearing white linen hats with a flap behind the neck, porters, free negroes, and all the miscellaneous loungers of a small British West India station. A motley crowd, gathered together apparently from every quarter of the little town—a crowd to whom this low-lying, sea-green steamer is evidently an object of the intensest curiosity.

And now, toward evening, when the cooler breeze is beginning to set in from the sea, and the band is playing in front of the barracks, and the harbor is gay with pleasure-boats, the *Stormy Petrel*, having taken in her coal, moves out again to her former anchorage, and there awaits the arrival of her pilot—a seasoned, experienced New Englander, native of a certain well-known whal-

ing-station yeleft Martha's Vineyard, on the coast of Massachusetts—one Zachary Polter by name, who comes off presently in a row-boat with his wife, and has a private interview with the captain before bidding her good-by.

This man's price for running the *Stormy Petrel* into Charleston and back again to Nassau is seven hundred and fifty pounds for the round trip, and half the money down before starting. His risk is great, and therefore his pay is high. He will be roughly dealt with if the *Stormy Petrel* falls in with one of the Northern blockaders on the way. So he has five minutes with closed doors in the captain's cabin before starting, and there receives across the table three hundred and seventy-five pounds in good and true Bank of England notes. These he stows carefully away in the recesses of a well-worn pocket-book, which he hands over to his wife, who puts it carefully in her bosom. A hard-faced, weather-beaten, rough fellow of a pilot, ready to take his life in his hand; but tender-hearted withal, and not ashamed to draw his sleeve across his eyes and kiss his wife at parting! This over, she goes away quite quietly and steadily, rowed by a stalwart young negro in a striped jersey; and when she is some little way from the steamer puts her handkerchief to her eyes, and looks back no more.

"And now, Mr. Polter," says the captain, "what have we to expect out yonder? The Federals, I suppose, are on the look-out for visitors?"

Mr. Zachary Polter, regarding the deck in the light of a monster spittoon, and behaving accordingly, replies, dryly:

"Wa'al, cap'n, I guess our people hev skinned their eyes pretty clean for the work, this time."

"What ships have they now off Charleston Harbor?"

"The *Wabash*, the *Seminole*, and the *Roanoke*; not keown'tin' all kinder little wasps o' gun-boats and other small fry," says Mr. Zachary Polter.

"Humph! Only three ships of war."

"Wa'al, cap'n, I won't swear to that. The *Pawnee* and the *Pocahontas* hev been off that coast, I know; and thar's bin a whisper afloat this last day or tew that the *Ironsides* is expected to jine."

"There is not a more formidable armor-plated vessel in the Federal service," observes Mr. Heneage, standing by.

Struck by the voice, the pilot turns and looks at the last speaker. "Hallo!" he exclaims. "Senator Shirley, Sir, is that you? Wa'al, Sir, I'm glad to see you. And they'll be glad to see you in Charleston, Sir. And I'm uncommon pleased to hev the job o' takin' you home again, Sir."

Saying which, Mr. Zachary Polter puts out a gigantic mahogany-colored paw, and shakes the ex-Senator's hand till he winces.

"My name is Heneage till I get back into Charleston," says the South Carolinian, good-humoredly.

"Sir, all right—Heneage it is; but, I take it, we'll give you yer right spellin' afore we're forty-eight hours older."

"This is not your first attempt at running the blockade, Mr. Pilot," says the captain, sharply.

"Why, no, cap'n. It is the second time. I ran a rotten old Mississippi tug-boat over jest

three days arter them ships had come down; and pretty smart work it was, tew, with a crack in hir steam-pipe big enough to let in a dollar-piece edgeways. But it'll be smarter work this time. There's more ships out; and them Parrott guns dew hit at a confounded long range."

"Pshaw! we can afford to laugh at the Parrott guns, if only we keep well away from 'em," says the captain, contemptuously.

To which Mr. Zachary Polter (still laboring under that little misapprehension with regard to the deck) replies in his dryest manner:

"Wa'al, cap'n, I guess it ain't exactly a pleasure trip we air takin' together. We'll laugh, if you please, when we git back agin into this here harbor."

And now the rapid dusk comes on. The men are at their posts; the captain gives the word; and the *Stormy Petrel*, which has been busily getting up her steam for the last hour or more, swings slowly round, and works out of port as composedly and unobtrusively as she had worked in. The chain of lamps along the quays, the scattered lights sparkling along the shores of the bay, the steady fire of the beacon at the mouth of the harbor, fade, and diminish, and are lost one by one in the distance. For a long time the *Stormy Petrel* skirts the coast line, keeping in with the Bahamas, and pursuing her way through British waters; but a little after midnight (the crescent moon now dropping down the west, and a light breeze blowing from the southeast) she stands out to sea.

A lovely night! the horizon somewhat hazy after the heat of the day, but the sea breaking all over into phosphorescent smiles and dimples, and the heavens one glowing vault of stars. The *Stormy Petrel*, her steam being now well up, rushes on with a foam of fire at her bows and a trail of molten diamonds in her wake. Now and then a shark plays round her in her course, distinctly visible in the light of his own progress, and then shoots off like a meteor. Thus the night wears, and at gray dawn the boy in the crow's-nest reports a steamer on the starboard quarter.

Scarcely has this danger been seen and avoided than another, and another, is sighted at some point or other of the horizon. And now swift orders, prompt obedience, eager scrutiny are the rule of the day; for the *Stormy Petrel* is in perilous waters, and her only chance of safety lies in the sharpness of her look-out, and the speed with which she changes her course when any possible enemy appears in sight. All day long, therefore, she keeps doubling like a hare; sometimes stopping altogether, to let some dangerous-looking stranger pass on ahead; sometimes turning back upon her course; but, thanks to her general invisibility and the vigilance of her pilot, escaping unseen, and even making fair progress in the teeth of every difficulty.

And now the sun goes down, half gold, half crimson, settling into a rim of fog-bank on the western horizon. Lower it sinks, and lower; the gold diminishing, the crimson gaining. Now, for a moment it hangs, a bloody shield, upon the verge of the waters, and the sky is flushed to the zenith, and every ripple crested with living fire. And now, suddenly, it is gone—and before the glow has yet had time to fade, the southern night rushes in.

An hour or so later the wind drops, and the *Stormy Petrel* steams straight into a light fog, which lies across her path like a soft, fleecy upright wall of cloud.

"This fog is in our favor, Mr. Polter," says De Benham, pacing the deck with rapid steps: for the night has now turned somewhat chill and raw.

"Wa'al, Sir, that's as it may be," replies the pilot, cautiously. "The fog helps to hide us; but then, yew see, it likewise helps to run us into danger."

And the event proves that that sagacious renegade is right; for at a little after midnight, when all seems to be solitude and security, and no breath is stirring, and no sound is heard save the rushing of the *Stormy Petrel* through the placid waters, there suddenly rises up before the eyes of all on board a great, ghostly, shadowy Something—a Phantom Ship, vague, mountainous, terrific—from the midst of which there issues a trumpet-tongued voice, saying:

"HEAVE-TO, STEAMER, OR I'LL SINK YOU."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"THE ATHENS OF PERICLES."

It may be remembered that Temple De Benham, smoking his after-dinner pipe in the porch of a certain river-side hostelry, chanced, one memorable evening, to overhear some fragments of a sufficiently unimportant dialogue in the adjoining parlor. The speakers were Mr. and Miss Alleyne; and almost the first expression of opinion to which De Benham heard the painter give utterance in the course of that brief conversation was his dislike to the painting of commission pictures.

To hundreds—nay, to thousands—of struggling artists such expression of opinion would sound like affectation or insanity; but in Mr. Alleyne's case it was literally true. He loved to paint a picture for his own pleasure—to take his own time about it—to feel himself unfettered alike in the choice and treatment of his subject. Then, and then only, he used to say, it was possible for him to do full justice to the power that was in him. Then only, as his daughter would admit when appealed to for confirmation of the fact, he was wont to work with genuine industry.

Yet Mr. Alleyne seldom found leisure to produce more than one such picture in the year, and there were sometimes years when even that one was not forthcoming. His hands, in truth, were always more than sufficiently full of those commissions which he professed to hate. Hate them as he might, however, and grumble over them as he might, he was bound either to accept them or forfeit his connection. Now Mr. Alleyne was not a popular painter. He was not an R.A., nor even an A.R.A. He exhibited very little; for his works, being executed to order, went home to their owners, for the most part, as soon as finished. His reputation, in short, high as it was, scarcely strayed beyond the limits of a certain small circle of aristocratic patrons; and Mr. Alleyne was not the man to give up that "audience, fit though few," for the wider arena but less certain issues of public favor. He knew the value of his connection, and fully appreciated the

advantages accruing thereunto. It maintained him in comfort, and, had he cared to work harder and spend less, would have maintained him in affluence. It ministered to the gratification of his tastes; and it opened to him the sort of society he liked best to mix in. For about seven months out of every twelve, for instance, Mr. Alleyne would be staying at the country place of one or other of his patrons, painting park glades, ancestral oaks, Elizabethan halls, terraces, galleries, and all those wonderful landscape and architectural subjects in which our old English homes are rich beyond all parallel. Treated on these occasions with all the honors of a guest, he rode, and drove, and dined, and was invited out with his hosts, and fared like a prince. At other times, when not actually staying at the great house, he would lodge at the steward's, or some neighboring farm, or establish himself, as at Cillingford, in the village inn, and have his daughter with him. In the winters he staid at home, still painting commissions from sketches made upon the spot, dining out frequently, and spending most of his evenings at his club. Mr. Alleyne, in short, led a very pleasant, easy life, and amused himself by grumbling at the sources of his prosperity.

Still, as it has already been stated, the artist did occasionally make time to produce what he called a "holiday picture;" and this holiday picture, if not bought up before it left his studio, was sure to be sold the day of the private view.

It had not happened to him, indeed, for many a long year—not, perhaps, since he had become a father and a widower—to have one of these pictures left upon his hands.

Now it so fell out that, during the early spring of 1861, Mr. Alleyne solaced himself in the intervals of his other labors by taking up a certain neglected canvas that had been standing with its face to the wall for years; and, falling into a sudden enthusiasm for the subject (as one is apt to do with a sketch or poem long laid aside and forgotten), he finished it at a white heat, and got it off in time for the Academy. Having been at work upon it with closed doors up to the last moment, he did not, this time, sell it off the easel; but it was sold, and the red star was on the frame, before the rooms in Trafalgar Square had been thrown open more than an hour to that favored multitude whom the President invites to the private view. And the purchaser of the picture was Mr. Hardwicke.

It happened, of course, through the mere accident of taste. Mr. Hardwicke knew nothing of Mr. Alleyne, except by reputation; and Mr. Alleyne knew nothing of Mr. Hardwicke, except that he remembered to have heard the name, but could not tell in what connection.

"The picture is sold, Juliet," he said, when he went home that afternoon.

"Of course it is sold, papa," replied his daughter, lovingly. "I never doubted that. Has Sir Edwin Fletcher bought it?"



"HAVING THE DEAD GERANIUM LEAVES IN HER LAP, SHE BEGAN SLOWLY SHEEDING THEM TO PIECES."

"No—a stranger. A Mr. Hardwicke. I fancy I know the name. Do you remember anything about him?"

Miss Alleyne turned to the window, and began plucking the dead leaves from her geraniums.

"Where does he live?" she asked.

"He is down in the Red Book for a house in the Regent's Park, a place in Kent, and some warehouse in the City."

"Then I think I know. He is a cousin of Mr. Archibald Blyth."

"Ay?—a man of some position, too."

"I believe he is very rich," said Miss Alleyne. And then there were some moments of silence.

"By-the-way," said Mr. Alleyne, presently, "is it not to this Mr. Hardwicke's employment that that other young fellow, Debenham, has taken himself?"

Miss Alleyne bent over her flowers.

"I—yes, I think so," she replied.

"A strange turn for a young man of talent to take! I fancied he was devoted to his art."

Miss Alleyne made no reply.

"But it's a self-indulgent, money-making, degenerate age," said the painter, philosophically; "and the true spirit of art is well-nigh extinct. I think, my love, I will take a cup of strong coffee and a *chasse* of curaçoa before I go to dress."

"To dress?" said Miss Alleyne. "I thought you dined at home to-night, papa."

"Ah, I forgot to tell you before—Captain Bathurst has asked me to join him at the Carlton. You are not disappointed, my love?"

Miss Alleyne smiled, and would not allow that she was in the least disappointed.

"You know of old," she said, "that I do not mind dining alone."

She did not add, however, that, accustomed as she was to his absence, she had of late so lost her old buoyancy of spirits that she had come almost to dread the recurrence of these solitary evenings.

"He is a gentlemanly-looking man," said Mr. Alleyne, presently, while sipping his coffee and curaçoa.

"Who, dear papa?"

"Mr. Hardwicke."

"Did you see him?"

"For a moment. I went up to learn who had bought the picture, and the secretary pointed him out to me as he was leaving the rooms."

"I hope he has the taste to appreciate it," said Miss Alleyne.

"Well, he has had the taste to buy it," said the painter.

"That proves nothing. It may have taken his fancy; or some one may have advised him; or he may have been to the place, and bought it for the association."

"*Qu'importe?* His check will be none the less valid."

"Nay, papa—your best picture!"

Mr. Alleyne, rising to go, pinched his daughter's ear, and said, smilingly:

"Ah, pussy, you always think the last picture is the best!"

"You always think it is the worst."

"Just so. The artist desponds, missing his ideal; the loving woman by his side (wife or daughter, as the case may be) sees his work with the eyes of her heart, and finds no flaw. That is one of the few pleasant laws that hold this uncomfortable world together."

"Generalize as much as you like, papa," said Miss Alleyne, with something of her old, pretty, willful manner, "I maintain that '*The Athens of Pericles*' is the best picture you ever painted."

Mr. Alleyne stopped with his hand on the door.

"By-the-way," he said, "did you ever hear young Blyth speak of his cousin's sister, Miss Hardwicke?"

"I did not even know that there was a Miss Hardwicke. What of her?"

"What of her? Simply that she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life."

And with this he closed the door, and was gone.

Miss Alleyne looked after him as if scarcely realizing the full meaning of his words. The most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life! It was a sweeping assertion—such an assertion as one accepts, for the most part, with a certain degree of silent qualification. Perhaps Miss Alleyne was so qualifying it in her own mind; at all events, she sat for a long time grave, and pale, and earnestly thinking. Then, having the dead geranium leaves in her lap, she began slowly shredding them to pieces—shredding them to pieces, and casting the fragments into the fireplace one by one.

The most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life! Ay, and probably one of the richest women, too. Beautiful—and rich—and Mr. Hardwicke's sister! Her mind kept traveling round those three facts with a persistency that was painful to herself. She went over them again, and again, and again. And so the dusk came on and found her still thinking.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RUNNING THE BLOCKADE.

"Guess it's the *Roanoke*," observed the pilot, calmly.

Even as he said the words, the American loomed out distincter, closer, within pistol-shot from deck to deck.

The captain of the *Stormy Petrel* answered the hostile summons.

"Ay, ay, Sir," he shouted through his speaking-trumpet. "We are hove to."

And then he called down the tube to those in the engine-room, "Ease her!"

"You won't stop the boat, Captain Hay?" exclaimed De Benham, breathlessly.

"I have stopped her, Sir," snarled the captain. Then thundered a second mandate from the threatening phantom alongside.

"Lay to, for boats!"

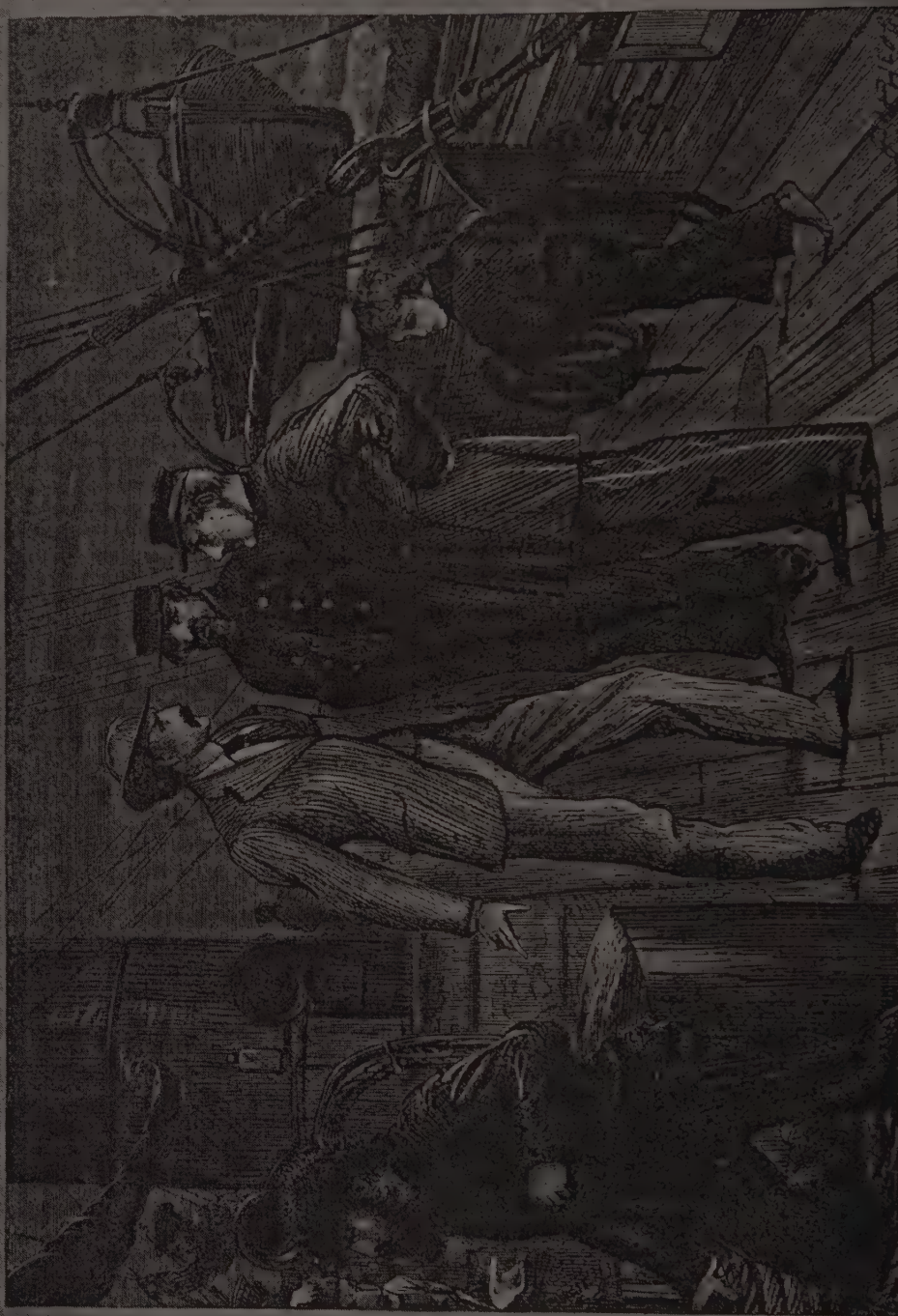
To which the captain again responded: "Ay, ay, Sir!"

De Benham ground his teeth. "But—God of heaven! man," he said, scarcely conscious of his own vehemence, "do you give in thus—without an effort?"

The captain turned upon him with an oath.

"Who says I'm going to give in?" he answered, savagely. "Wait till you see me do it, Sir!"

And now the *Stormy Petrel*, her steam being suddenly turned off, had ceased to move. All on deck stood silent, motionless, waiting with suspended breath. They could hear the captain



"WILL YOU LET THEM BOARD US?" HE SAID, HOARSELY.

of the cruiser issuing his rapid orders—trace, through the fog, the outline of the quarter-boats as they were lowered into the water—hear the splash of the oars, the boisterous gayety of the men—

De Benham uttered a suppressed groan, and the perspiration stood in great beads upon his forehead. He was powerless; and the sense of his powerlessness was intolerable.

"Will you let them board us?" he said, hoarse-

ly, pointing to the boats, now half-way between the two vessels.

The captain grinned, put his lips again to the tube, shouted down to the engineer, "Full speed ahead!" and with one quivering leap the *Stormy Petrel* shot out again upon her course, like a greyhound let loose.

"There, Mr. Supercargo," said the captain, grimly; "that's my way of giving in. Our American friend will hardly desert his boats upon

the open sea in such a night as this—even for the fun of capturing a blockade-runner."

At this moment a red flash and a tremendous report declared the prompt indignation of the Federal commander. But almost before those rolling echoes had died away the *Stormy Petrel* was half a mile ahead, and not an outline of the cruiser was visible through the fog.

"Wa'al, now," said Mr. Zachary Polter, "that's what I call sinful extravagance. I calculate them chaps will come to want good powder and shot some day, afore they die."

De Benham went up to the captain with extended hand.

"Captain Hay," he said, frankly, "I spoke just now under excitement—I beg your pardon."

The captain grunted, and yielded his hand somewhat unwillingly.

"It is not the supercargo's place, Mr. Debenham, to question the discretion of the captain," he said, with some asperity—and turned away.

De Benham accepted the rebuke in silence, knowing that he had deserved it.

The night passed over without further incident, and by five o'clock next morning the *Stormy Petrel* was within eight hours of her destination. Both captain and pilot had calculated on making considerably less way in the time, and had allowed a much wider margin for detours and delays; so that now they were not a little perplexed at finding themselves so near the end of their journey. To go on was impossible; for they could only hope to slip through the cordon under cover of the night. And yet to remain where they were was almost as bad. However, they had no alternative; so, after some little consultation, they agreed to lie to for the present, keeping up their steam meanwhile, and holding themselves in readiness to repeat the manoeuvres of yesterday whenever any vessel hove in sight.

The fog had now cleared off. The day was brilliant; the sky one speckless dome of intensest blue; the sun an intolerable Splendor fast climbing to the zenith. The blockade-runners, who would have given much for dark and cloudy weather, revenged themselves by saying uncivil things of the glorious luminary; till presently a long, black, horizontal cloud on the horizon warned them of a steamer in the offing, whereupon they edged away in the opposite direction as quickly as possible.

And now their troubles had begun again. Sometimes it was a frigate, sometimes a merchant ship, sometimes a steamer, sometimes a sloop of war—but it was always something; and the *Stormy Petrel* was perpetually sheering off to one or other point of the compass.

Toward sunset, Mr. Zachary Polter began to look grave.

"Guess we sha'n't know whar we air if this game goes on much longer," said he. "It aren't in natur not to get out of one's reck'ning arter dodgin' and de-vi-atin' all day long in this style."

Still there was no help for it. Dodge and deviate the *Stormy Petrel* must, if she was to be kept out of harm's way; and even so, with all her dodging and deviating, it seemed well-nigh miraculous that she should escape observation.

At length, as evening drew on and the sun neared the horizon, preparations were made for the final run. Both captain and pilot, by the help of charts, soundings, and so forth, had pre-

ty well satisfied themselves as to their position, and Mr. Zachary Polter, knowing at what hour it would be high tide on the bar, had calculated the exact time for going into the harbor.

"'Twouldn't be amiss, cap'n," said this latter, "if you was to change that white weskit for suthin dark; nor if you, sir," turning to De Benham, "was to get quit o' that light suit altogether for the nex few hours."

The captain muttered something about "unnecessary nonsense;" but went to his cabin, all the same, to change the obnoxious garment. Whereupon Mr. Zachary Polter gave it as his opinion that if the captain and all on board were to black the whites of their eyes and put their teeth in mourning it would not be more than the occasion warranted.

After this an unlucky cock, which had traveled with them in the character of a deck-passenger all the way from Liverpool (but was addicted to crowing lustily about midnight and the small hours of the morning), was hurried by the steward to an untimely end. And then, the brief twilight being already past, the engineers piled on the coal; the captain gave the word; and the *Stormy Petrel* steered straight for Charleston.

And now it is night; clear, but not overclear, although the stars are shining. Objects, however, are discernible at some distance, and ships are sighted continually. But as none of these lie directly in his path, and as he knows his own boat to be invisible by night beyond a certain radius, the captain holds on his course unhesitatingly. In the mean while the hours seem to fly. The *Stormy Petrel*, now clearing the waters at full speed, stretches herself like a racer to her work, flinging the spray over her sharp bows and speeding onward gallantly. About midnight the stars begin to cloud over and the night thickens; but there is still no mist upon the sea. Toward two in the morning their patent lead tells that they are nearing shore. Then the pilot gives orders to "slow down the engines"—a breathless silence prevails—every eye is on the watch, every ear on the alert—and, momentarily expecting to catch their first glimpses of the blockading squadron, they steal slowly and cautiously on their way.

And now the sense of time becomes suddenly reversed. Up to this point the hours had gone by like minutes; but now the minutes go by like hours. Beacons there are none to guide them, for the harbor-lights have all been abolished since the arrival of the enemies' ships outside the bar; but those on board began to ask themselves whether some outline of the coast ought not, ere this, to be visible. And then comes that other question—have they indeed so "dodged and deviated" that the pilot has lost his reckoning?

Still the *Stormy Petrel* creeps on—still each fresh sounding brings her into shallower water—still those eager watchers stare into the darkness, knowing that the tide will turn and the dawn be drawing on ere long, and that after sunrise neither speed nor skill can save them.

At length, when suspense is sharpened almost to pain, there comes into sight a faint, indefinite something, which presently resolves itself into the outline of a large vessel lying at anchor, with her head to the wind and a faint spark of light at her prow.

Mr. Zachary Polter slaps his thigh triumphantly.

"That ar's the senior officer's ship," he whispers. "She lies jest tew mile off the mouth o' Charleston Harbor—an' she's bound, yer see, to show a light to her own cruisers. Darned, now, if we ain't fixed it uncommon tidy this time!"

And now, not one by one, but, as it were, simultaneously, the whole line of blockaders comes into sight, some to the right, some to the left of that which shows the light. Of these they count six besides the flag-ship, all under way and gliding slowly, almost imperceptibly, to and fro in the darkness.

Between some two of these the *Stormy Petrel* must make her final run; and upon this point there ensues a momentary altercation between captain and pilot—the former insisting that the widest passage lies between two cruisers a little way off to the right, and the latter preferring to go in between the flag-ship and the nearest blockader on the left.

"Tell yer, cap'n," says he, emphatically, "yer downright wrong this fit. I guess we shall git threw as right as a fiddle; but if we air cotched sight of—wa'al, then, we know that one of the tew's at anker and can't run arter us. Besides, the flag-ship allers lies nighest in with the channel."

So the captain gives in sulkily, as is his wont; steam is again got up to the highest pressure; and the *Stormy Petrel* rushes on at full speed. Then the two ships between which lies her perilous path grow momentarily clearer and nearer, and a dark ridge of coast becomes dimly visible beyond them.

And now the supreme moment is at hand. Straight and fast the good boat flies, her propellers throbbing furiously, like a pulse at high fever, and the water hissing past her bows. Now every man on board holds his breath. Now flag-ship and cruiser (the one about half a mile to the right, the other about half a mile to the left) lie but a few hundred yards ahead—now, for the briefest second, the *Stormy Petrel* is in a line with both—now she has left them as many hundred yards astern—and now, all at once, she is in the midst of the current, and rushing straight at that long white ridge of boiling surf which marks the position of the bar!

"By Jove!" says the captain, drawing a long breath, "we've done it."

"Don't yew make tew sartin, cap'n, till we're over the bar," replies Mr. Zachary Polter. "We ain't out o' gunshot range yet a while."

Over the bar they are, however, ere long, safe and successful.

And now the steam-whistle is blown twice, shrill and fearlessly, and two white lights are hung out over the bows of the vessel; for their pilot has been in before, and knows the signals necessary to be observed inside the cordon. Were these signals neglected, the *Stormy Petrel* would be fired upon by the Confederate forts.

And now, too, lights are lit, and tongues are loosened, and even Captain Frank Hay unbends for once, promising the men a double allowance of grog, and inviting De Benham and Heneage to a bottle of Champagne in his own cabin. A long irregular line of coast has meanwhile emerged, as it were, into the gray of dawn; and

just as the first flush of crimson streams up the eastern sky the *Stormy Petrel* casts anchor under the sand-bag batteries of Morris Island.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FIRST NUGGET.

MORRIS ISLAND, seen by broad daylight, proved to be an unattractive place enough, low and flat, diversified by rolling mounds of sand, patches of starved grass, and bitter salt-water marshes. There were tents pitched here and there among the sand-hills; and just against the beach, long banks of sand-bag batteries, surmounted by a line of black parapet, port-holed like a ship's side, with the muzzles of the guns grinning through.

Sullivan's Island—a long tongue of land running out some way lower down on the opposite shore—partook apparently of the same low, sandy, marshy characteristics, relieved, however, by the noble water-front of Fort Moultrie; while midway between both shores, the Stars and Bars flaunting gayly overhead, rose, as it seemed, sheer out of the broad waters of the estuary, the battered, eyeless walls of Fort Sumter.

Yellow and turbid as the Tiber at the foot of St. Angelo flowed river and tide, now fast ebbing out to sea. White and dazzling stretched the sandy shores on either side. A hot wind blew, oppressive as the Italian sirocco, and thick with sand as the winds of the Egyptian desert. Half choked, half blinded, with smarting eyes, parched lips, and burning throats, the crew of the *Stormy Petrel* agreed together that the bold defenders of these harbor forts must have a disagreeable time of it.

No sooner was the camp awake and stirring on Morris Island than the beach was crowded with Confederate officers and soldiers, all dressed pretty much alike, in coarse gray cloth, with worsted braid and yellow facings, and palmetto-tree buttons. Their eagerness, their enthusiasm, their excitement knew no bounds. About a dozen officers put off in a boat and came on board at once, shaking hands with every one, pressing them to land, and breakfast, and make the tour of the batteries; asking a thousand questions, and volunteering all kinds of hospitalities.

"By Jove! gentlemen, you are the first who have ventured to run the blockade with a steamer of this size," said one.

"An almighty plucky thing to do, captain!" exclaimed another.

"I reckon now, you've brought a cargo of Enfields, to help us whip the Yankees!" cried a third.

A fourth went round addressing himself in the same words to the captain, supercargo, and passenger.

"You'll dine with me to-morrow, Sir, at the Mills House. Seven sharp. My card—Colonel Drummond, at your service."

"Every brave Britisher who runs the blockade of this harbor is the guest and brother of every man, woman, and child in Charleston city!"

"Darn my eye-teeth, gentlemen, if I let you go on to Charleston without first coming over to my tent for a bottle of Madeira!"

Resisting all this, however, and much more to the same effect, the captain of the *Stormy Petrel* succeeded at last in getting rid of his military visitors; and so, running up the Union Jack, prepared to be gone. Then the battery saluted him with a single gun at parting; Fort Moultrie followed up the compliment with another; and, acknowledging each civility with a dip of her flag, the blockade-runner, thus greeted, steamed on for Charleston.

Fort Sumter was now passed—pitted, and seamed, and blackened from the shelling it had gone through. Then came Fort Johnson, on another sandy promontory to the left—then, lying well off the land just at that point where the Ashley and Cooper rivers meet and mingle, Shute's Folly Island with Castle Pinckney (a huge round fort, like a gigantic martello tower), showing a bold front toward the sea—then, on a sandy delta between the mouths of the two rivers, sparkling, many-colored, many-steeped, presenting a stately show of wharves and quays, white domes, green trees, and public and private buildings of every description—Charleston.

News of her arrival having in the mean while been telegraphed from Morris Island, the *Stormy Petrel*, as she steamed in, was met by an excited, huzzaing, welcoming multitude, which greeted the blockade-runner as enthusiastically as if she were fresh from the scene of some great naval victory. On they came, running along the quays as the boat drew on, and gathering about the landing-place as soon as she was made fast alongside—soldiers, townspeople, women, children, and niggers, waving caps and handkerchiefs, clanking spurs and sabres, shouting, laughing, elbowing, surging to and fro, and wild with that sort of excitement which, in revolutionary times, pervades the air like an inflammable gas, and is ready to flame out upon the smallest provocation.

The gangway once adjusted, it became no easy matter to keep the crowd at arm's-length. Having issued orders, however, that no one should be allowed to come on board except the municipal authorities, or persons having business with the supercargo, the captain stationed two men at the top of the gangway and one at the foot, and so kept off all intruders.

Mr. Heneage, or, as he should more properly be called, Senator Shirley, had in the mean while seized the first opportunity of landing; and, being instantly recognized, was seen by those on board struggling to shake a hundred hands at once, now carried this way, now that, and finally swept away by a compact body of fellow-townsmen, all boisterously cheering.

And now, captain and pilot, mates, engineers, and half the crew, having done so much of their work, were free to go ashore and make merry; but the supercargo's work was only just beginning. An anxious day was it for Temple De Benham. In none of those business transactions upon which he had been employed by Mr. Hardwicke had he as yet been called upon either to buy or sell; and now, for the first time in his life, he found himself responsible for the sale of property to the value of many thousands. He fully appreciated the weight of this responsibility. He knew that for the due fulfillment of his task he should need all his coolness of head and all the presence of mind he could command. He knew that he must be prompt, but not precipitate;

bold, and yet cautious. Above all, he knew that he must betray no sign of the commercial novice. To assume experience, though he had it not, was almost the first necessity of his position.

Having thought it out, and resolved with himself beforehand that his best plan would be to remain on board for the transaction of all business relating to the present cargo, he had cleared his little cabin and turned it into a temporary office. A table and a couple of chairs, a ledger and order-book, a dispatch-box, a pile of blank invoices, a large inkstand, blotting pad, and so forth, gave the tiny place quite a business-like air. Then the young man tried to transform himself in like manner, that he might look as business-like as his cabin. It was well that he had made all ready beforehand, for his customers were pressing to come on board long enough before the captain was willing to admit them.

The *Stormy Petrel* left Morris Island while the day was yet young, and so reached her moorings by eleven A.M. Before two P.M. De Benham, had he so pleased, could have sold every item of his cargo; but he hung back, testing his market and holding out for the highest prices. By five P.M. he had sold every item—at a profit of from nine to twelve hundred per cent.!

Several thousand pairs of men's flannel shirts, for instance, bought wholesale at a great Manchester warehouse for something like fifty-four shillings the dozen, were taken by a single purchaser at the rate of ten dollars each shirt. A like number of clump-soled boots for men, costing five shillings the pair, were sold *en masse* at two pounds eighteen shillings. Ten cases of revolvers by Boissy of Liège, for which Mr. Hardwicke paid about six hundred francs (or twenty-four pounds English) per dozen, were sold by De Benham at the rate of twenty pounds for each weapon. The rest of the cargo, consisting of hats, hosiery, cotton goods, and the like, went at prices bearing the same proportion to their original cost; and as for the blankets and Enfield rifles, they realized the heaviest profit of all, being at once bought up on account of the Confederate Government by the Superintendent of the Military Store Department.

When the last "trade" was done and the last buyer had left the ship, De Benham shut himself up in his cabin and set to work to draw out a rough balance-sheet of the day's transactions. Allowing a broad margin for expenses, this balance-sheet, at the end of two hours' hard calculation, proved a clear profit of about eighty-seven thousand pounds English.

The supercargo did not wait to consider what his own percentage on this sum would come to. The result once mastered, he locked up his ledgers and papers, seized his portmanteau, landed, called the first hack that came in his way, drove to the great hotel in Meeting Street known as the Mills House, and went straight to bed with the worst headache he had ever had in his life.

Being waked, however, somewhere about midnight by a braying of trumpets and trombones, a trampling of many feet in the street below, and a tumultuous chorus shouting the refrain to "Dixie's Land," he sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes, wondering where he was, and for the moment forgetting what had happened since he was a poor art-student at Zollenstrasse-am-Main. Then it suddenly flashed upon him that he was poor no

longer—that he was on the high-road to wealth—that he was entitled to fifteen per cent. on the profits already realized. And then, bad as his headache was, he could not help calculating his gains.

They amounted to no less a sum than thirteen thousand and fifty pounds. He could not believe it. He went over it again and again in his head, and still with the same result. At last he was convinced. Fifteen per cent. came to one hundred and fifty pounds in every thousand; and eighty seven times one hundred and fifty amounted, beyond all question, to thirteen thousand and fifty.

After that, his chances of sleep went suddenly down to zero, and he never closed his eyes again till it was broad daylight.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

NOT A BAD BARGAIN.

THE next day or two in Charleston was given up to unloading the *Stormy Petrel*, delivering the goods to their several purchasers, and receiving payment for the same. De Benham was careful, by-the-way, to stipulate for the latter in the shape of bills upon English houses. He could not bring himself, somehow, to put much faith in brand-new Confederate bank-notes, which, like the fairy gold in the Irish legend, might, he thought, in a single night turn suddenly to a mere heap of withered leaves. Then came the main business of all—the buying of the cotton.

The supply then actually in the town was, they told him, scanty; for, in consequence of the stagnation of the trade, it was yet lying at the plantations up the country. But there was plenty of it for De Benham's purpose in the long, low lines of open sheds along the quays—plenty and to spare for the freightage of a whole fleet of *Stormy Petrels*. Some of these sheds were still stacked with cotton bales, each bale in its "bagging" of Indian canvas. On the wharves were piles of cotton bales, ready for removal. But the

removals were now few and far between, and the trade was already at a dead-lock for want of buyers and a market. There was something singularly melancholy in the sight of all this precious produce upon which so much human labor had already been expended, and for want of which so many millions of workers must be thrown out of employment. De Benham could not help saying so once or twice; but those to whom he spoke—hot-blooded Charleston merchants turned soldiers, with jingling brass spurs, and clanking sabres, and the palmetto-tree embroidered on their caps—only smiled, boasting of how soon they meant to "whip" the Yankees, drive off the blockaders, and astonish all creation.

"Besides, Sir," said one, a tall, lanky man in uniform, with a pen behind his ear, "it's all very well for you Britishers to preach about non-intervention, but you can't stick to that long, Sir. You have between four and five millions depending on us for their daily bread; and you'll pretty soon find out that it must be cotton or a revolution. Sir, I reckon you won't risk a revolution. We shall have your ships of war in Charleston Harbor before Christmas-day comes round, and then I rather think the Yankees will find themselves nowhere!"

Said another: "No, Sir—your Government will have acknowledged us, and every bale of that cotton will be in Liverpool, before the fall. You will have come over to us as allies, Sir, by that time—if we haven't already polished off the Yankees without your help!"

To such replies De Benham could oppose only a grave protest or a civil silence. But all protestation was in vain. That the policy of Great Britain was a fixed policy, not to be reversed by any pressure of discontent or distress at home, was what they could not and would not believe. As for their gay, reckless, hectoring self-confidence, it only struck him, stranger as he was, as the very saddest phase of all this fatal struggle. He saw from the first that it was a doomed cause, and that all these hot hopes and valorous impulses must end in defeat and death, and humiliation more bitter than either.

It was not to the warehouse of the merchant, however, but to the office of the broker that De Benham went for his homeward cargo; for cotton is bought and sold like stock "down South," as it is at Liverpool, and in its mere transfer supports an intermediary class.

Dingy; remote; odorous of the almighty dollar; odorous also of tobacco; lurking in gloomy ground-floors or dingy first-floor flats in Eastbay Street, were then, as now, to be found the counting-houses of the Charleston cotton brokers. How silent they seemed, these haunts seething with business but a little while ago! how deserted those staircases and passages, but lately echoing to the daily tramp of hundreds of eager footsteps!

Mr. Hardwicke had recommended his supercargo to employ an eminent cotton-broking firm with which his house had long had dealings—the firm of Harper, Prideaux, and Barbuckle—and to the offices of Messrs. Harper, Prideaux, and Barbuckle De Benham repaired accordingly. These he found, after some little difficulty, on the first-floor of an immense gloomy building, which harbored dozens of firms on every flat. A

strange sort of office, too, when found, and curiously unlike those tiny dens, sacred to the stock-broking world of Threadneedle Street and Austin Friars—an office consisting of one large barren room, like a second-class waiting-room at a railway station, with a little space railed off at one end for the clerks, and another little space railed off at the other end for the principals; carpetless, of course, and painfully suggestive of the utility of spittoons; with hard, uncomfortable chairs standing about; and a huge black stove in the middle of the floor; and grimy windows; and framed advertisements of Emigration Agencies, Fast-sailing Lines of Packet-boats, Celebrated A 1 Clipper Ships, patent Steam-plows, Steam thrashing-machines, and other agricultural implements hanging on the walls.

There was but one clerk in this cheerful apartment—a sallow, sandy youth of about eighteen—whom De Benham surprised in the act of practicing the broad-sword exercise by himself with great energy. He desisted in some confusion at sight of a stranger, and apologized for his occupation by saying that he had lately joined that famous corps known as the "South Carolinian Invincibles."

De Benham then explained that his own business with the firm of Harper, Prideaux, and Barbuckle was not military, but commercial; whereupon the "Invincible" hung his weapon on a peg behind the door, snatched up his cap, and, "reckoning he should find the major on parade," vanished precipitately.

The major came in due time—a puffy, watery-eyed, stolid-visaged man, buckled in much too tight at the waist, and considerably embarrassed by his sword. He proved to be the Prideaux of the firm; and commenced proceedings by unbuttoning and unbuckling as much as possible, and vociferating furiously for "Boker's Bitters"—a marvelous compound much beloved by Charlestonians, which was promptly brought by a white-headed old negro whom De Benham had seen sitting on a stool in the entrance hall.

De Benham tried to excuse himself from partaking of this beverage at so early an hour in the day—the American clock on the chimney-piece was then pointing to twenty minutes past nine A.M.—but the major would not hear of it.

"Sir," said that commercial warrior, "there are two things which can not be cultivated in this climate without the aid of cool drinks; and those two things are Trade and War. If you and I are to do a trade together, Sir, we must surely drink together—and cotton, let me tell you, is a powerful absorbent."

"There seems to be no business doing of any kind," said De Benham.

"No, Sir. How should there be business doing, with our ports shut up, and our young men all gone over to the ranks of the army, and these cursed Yankees still upon our hands? But, Sir, we don't take much account of business at a time like this. We are a commercial people, it is true; but we are also a military and a patriotic people. We are burning just now, Sir, with military ardor. Our souls are in arms, and our swords thirst for the blood of the invader. What quality of cotton, now, do you think of buying?"

And plunging thus abruptly from the heroic

to the commonplace, the gallant major suddenly scrambled upon a very high, spindle-shanked office-stool, and produced from a drawer in his bureau a number of little wooden bowls containing specimens of raw cotton. Upon these, their quality of fibre, length of staple, and so forth, he then proceeded to discourse with great earnestness, recommending his "Bowed Georgia" for one excellence, his "Middling Uplands" for another, and getting quite enthusiastic on the subject of "Sea Island."

Burning with military ardor as he was, however, and thirsting for the blood of the invader, the major proved to be an uncommonly keen man of business, quoting the highest prices, and something over and above the highest prices, in the market—if, indeed, it could be said that there was now any market at all. But De Benham had not been three days in Charleston without getting himself acquainted with all these particulars. He knew quite as well as Major Prideaux to how low an ebb the price of cotton had come, and of how much importance such an order as he had to give must be, at this time, to any house in that city.

"I may as well tell you once for all, Major Prideaux," he said at length, "that I am here to buy the best article I can find in Charleston at the lowest price for which it can be bought—and I mean to buy on no other conditions."

"And, Sir, I offer to transact it for you at seven and a half cents—the lowest price quoted on Charleston 'change this summer."

"That was a month ago, major," said De Benham.

"Sir," replied the major, with dignity, "I am not telling you that prices have risen since then; but I do tell you that not a cent lower has been quoted."

"I imagine that is because no more business has been done," said De Benham. "Prices can hardly be said to have fallen when there is no buying or selling going on: but the staple becomes more and more of a drug for all that."

"Sir," said the major, "the firm of Harper, Prideaux, and Barbuckle—"

"I beg your pardon," interposed De Benham, rising as if to go; "but what I mean to give is five cents per pound for the best Middling Uplands, of which I will take two thousand bales. If you think you can do it for me at that rate, I shall be happy to leave the matter in your hands—if not, I have the honor to wish you good-morning."

The major dipped his pen in the ink as promptly as if there had been no chaffering about the matter, and, filling in an oblong memorandum-paper, said:

"Same as sample number four; I take it, Sir?"

"The same as sample number four," replied De Benham.

Then followed some last words as to delivery and packing, and the affair was concluded.

"Well, Sir, I don't think you'll get your wisdom-teeth twisted out in a hurry," said the major, with an admiring twinkle in his eye, as they shook hands at parting. "You have done this trade at the lowest figure that has been reached yet; but I reckon you wouldn't get along quite so slick if there was ere another buyer in the market!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LORD STOCKBRIDGE.

WITH the dinner party given at Strathellan House, in honor of Lord Stockbridge, we have here no immediate concern. The Hardwicks were already famous for their sumptuous entertainments; and of this entertainment it need only be said that it was as sumptuous as the most lavish display of gold and silver plate, hair-powder, and gorgeous liveries could make it. There was, beside, a fair sprinkling of minor titles, and the inevitable Bishop—that clerical course, without which no state banquet of the period is complete.

This dinner-party, however, was important in its results, in so far as it converted Lord Stockbridge into an assiduous *habitué* of the big house in the Regent's Park. Now, Lord Stockbridge was all that Miss Hardwicke had described him to be—and more. He had lived by his wits from his youth upward; and for the last fifteen years had eked out that precarious capital by trading upon his probable succession to the estates and titles of a childless second cousin. He was in debt; and his debts were not all of the most creditable kind. Homburg, Baden-Baden, Spa, Wiesbaden, Ems, Monaco, knew him for their own. Upon the turf, wherever there was a turf, far and wide, at home and abroad, he had—a reputation. His contemporaries (especially his continental contemporaries) laid more vices to his charge than could, perhaps, be fairly proved against him; yet there were one or two dark stories current in the bells of Paris and Vienna, one or two disagreeable whispers afloat at Chantilly and Newmarket, which Lord Stockbridge would have done well to silence, if, haply, it had been in his power to do so. That he did not silence them, was taken by his detractors as proof positive of their truth.

Of these things, however, Miss Hardwicke knew nothing. She had heard no more than that he was extravagant, that he had spent most of his time abroad, and that his affairs were supposed to be embarrassed. The truth was that Lord Stockbridge's affairs were a very slough of embarrassment. He was steeped to the lips in mortgages, and from a rent-roll of seven thousand a year touched less than as many hundreds for his personal maintenance.

The spendthrift's common resource, however, was open to him; and he was minded to rehabilitate himself, if practicable, by means of a wealthy marriage.

Thus it happened that Lord Stockbridge was, as he elegantly expressed it when in familiar converse with his club cronies, "For sale, a bargain." Thus, also, it happened that the splendor of his reception at Strathellan House was not without its effect. Being "for sale," he conceived that here, if any where, he might fetch his price. Not to be mistaken on this point, however, he took occasion one morning to direct his steps eastward, and dropping in for an hour or two at Doctors' Commons, amused himself by turning over the wills of Hardwicke père, and Hardwicke, Alderman and sometime Lord Mayor of London; and very pretty reading he found them. When, besides the wealth conveyed to Miss Hardwicke under these two interesting documents, he also learned that she inherited a third

fortune from her mother, this worthy nobleman invoked the aid of the gods, and resolved that the great prize should be his if skill and perseverance, a persuasive tongue, the remains of a fine person, and a coronet, might avail to win it.

For he had been a particularly handsome man in his time, and was handsome still, though preserving only the wreck of his former beauty. His age at this time was exactly forty-nine; and though he looked worn and dissipated, yet society was disposed, on the whole, to credit him with fewer than his actual years. A slightly bloated look about the lips and jaw; a figure inclining to become heavy, but belted into bounds; an eye apt to be bloodshot, and a hand somewhat given to tremulousness early in the day, were traits and tokens significant enough to such as knew how to read them. But then society never saw him till after two P.M. Now Lord Stockbridge yawning over his breakfast at mid-day in dressing-gown and slippers, alone, jaded, brooding, off his guard, with the remains of last night's headache upon him, was a very different person from Lord Stockbridge dressed to perfection and mounted on a neat park hack at five or six, retailing piquant scandals between the courses at nine, or gliding from room to room with a camellia in his button-hole at eleven.

The Hardwicks, of course, saw him only at his best. Always urbane, always amusing, he came and went; called on the brother at his office in the City; rode beside the sister's carriage in the less crowded drives of the park; fell in with Mr. Hardwicke's pompous manner; accommodated himself to Miss Hardwicke's coldness; and slid, somehow, into the position of a frequent and favored guest.

Such was the state of affairs at Strathellan House when Temple De Benham started on his first expedition to the Southern States. Lord Stockbridge had just begun to pay open homage to the great City heiress; Miss Hardwicke, haughty and impassible as ever, neither encouraged nor discouraged his attentions; and Mr. Hardwicke, charmed to have a lord constantly at his table, was still more charmed by the evident possibility of having that lord for a brother-in-law.

"Lord Stockbridge is a very pleasant person," said Mr. Hardwicke to his sister, as they came strolling slowly homeward from the "Zoo" one glowing Sunday afternoon—that very day, by-the-way, that the *Stormy Petrel* was doubling to and fro in those perilous waters that lie between the Bahamas and the coast of South Carolina. "Lord Stockbridge is a very pleasant person, and improves upon acquaintance."

"Do you think so?" said Miss Hardwicke.

"I fancied he would have been at the Gardens this afternoon," continued the merchant.

"Perhaps he was there," said Miss Hardwicke.

"No, I am sure he was not. I looked for him in every direction; and when you were sitting down, I asked the man at the gate."

"I should not have thought the fact was worth so much trouble to ascertain."

"He admires you very much, Claudia," said Mr. Hardwicke.

Miss Hardwicke looked supreme indifference, and answered nothing.

"It is, indeed, something more than mere admiration," he went on. "If I am not greatly

mistaken—and I do not think I am often mistaken in my estimate of motive—Lord Stockbridge is actuated by a far deeper feeling.”

“Very probably,” said Miss Hardwicke, with a scornful smile. “I am rich.”

“In personal attractions, my dear Claudia; and in mental acquirements—not only in money. I am prepared to admit that Lord Stockbridge is probably obliged to consider the question of money—would be unable, perhaps, to marry without money; but it does not follow, because your fortune might possibly weigh with him, *inter alia*, that his sentiments—”

“The topic is not worth discussion,” interrupted Miss Hardwicke.

“You would not reject a man of birth and position, simply because you were rich and he was poor.”

“I can not tell.”

“But—”

“But Lord Stockbridge has given me no opportunity of either accepting or rejecting him, and is likely to give me none. I should be sorry to have the alternative forced upon me.”

“You surprise me, Claudia. A man like Lord Stockbridge—elegant, accomplished—”

“Am I to understand that he has retained you for his special pleader?” asked Miss Hardwicke.

“He has never opened his lips to me upon the subject.”

“Then oblige me by following his example. This sort of conversation is distasteful to me.”

They had now come to a wicket leading into their own grounds. This gate Mr. Hardwicke unlocked, and held open for his sister to pass through.

“It is not wonderful that I should wish to see you a peeress, Claudia,” he said, presently; “even though I should have to part from you.”

Miss Hardwicke smiled at him, almost tenderly.

“You are the best brother in the world, Josiah,” she said; “but that pleasure might be bought at too high a price.”

Coming round to the front by a path through the shrubbery, they found one of their own grooms leading a well-known bright chestnut up and down the drive.

“He is here,” said Mr. Hardwicke.

And as they entered the hall one of the twin giants stepped forward to say that Lord Stockbridge was in the drawing-room.

They found him looking out of the window, and whistling softly to himself. His quick ear, however, caught the faint rustle of the lady's dress.

“The servants told me you were at the Gardens,” he said, as they shook hands; “but I feared to miss you by the way. Was the ‘Zoo’ very gay this afternoon?”

“Crowded,” replied Mr. Hardwicke. “We looked for you.”

“I had intended to be there; but dropping in at Lady Chetwynd's *en passant*, I lost so much time that I thought it best to come here direct. Miss Hardwicke, I bring you a card for Lady Chetwynd's fancy-dress ball. I hope you care for the sort of thing, for I have broken all the ten commandments, and well-nigh committed suicide, to get it for you.”

Miss Hardwicke, superbly dressed in some kind of delicate silk covered with costly lace, ly-

ing back in a low, long chair, with her back to the light, looked up and smiled languidly.

“Many thanks,” she said; “but I do not know Lady Chetwynd.”

“That is nothing. There will be at least a hundred others in the same position. Givers of crowded parties in these times don't expect to know half their guests; and in such a case as this, people beg cards for themselves and friends in every direction.”

“Such persons must be lost to all sense of self-respect,” said Miss Hardwicke. “I mean, of course, those who beg for themselves.”

Lord Stockbridge shrugged his shoulders.

“Every body does it,” he replied. “I know a certain lady—a peeress in her own right—who would go on her knees to Lady Chetwynd's groom of the chambers for that card in your hand.”

“What a fortunate person I am, then, and how grateful I ought to be!” said Miss Hardwicke, somewhat disdainfully.

“Yes, if you were a mere woman of fashion, with no other object in life than to be seen every where and to be paraded daily in the columns of the *Morning Post*.”

“It will be a very brilliant party, I suppose?”

“The event of the season. Lady Chetwynd does these things very well, and means this time to surpass herself. Besides, the Prince is going.”

Miss Hardwicke looked down, and put control upon her features: but she could not keep back a faint flush of rising color. She had sat once or twice at a great civic banquet graced by the presence of a royal duke; but it had never yet befallen her to meet royalty thus in the ordinary way of society. Too proud to give expression to her pleasure, too proud even to let it be seen, that she was pleased, Miss Hardwicke could not keep down that flush of gratified ambition. Lord Stockbridge, on the watch for some such token, saw it, and scored a point, mentally, in his own favor.

“I could not go alone,” said Miss Hardwicke.

“A chaperon is easily found. There is my aunt, for instance—Mrs. Cadogan. She would be charmed.”

“What dress will you wear, Claudia?” asked Mr. Hardwicke.

“The very question I would have asked, if I dared,” said Lord Stockbridge.

“I ought to wear sackcloth and ashes, if such a catalogue of sins has been committed for my sake,” replied Miss Hardwicke. “But is a fancy costume indispensable?”

“Not absolutely, of course; but it pleases one's hosts. When people give a character ball, they like all the court-cards they can get.”

“What do you say to Cleopatra?” asked Mr. Hardwicke.

“Highly effective, if the asp were real; but therefore inconvenient.”

“Medea?” suggested Lord Stockbridge.

“Medea and Ristori are one in the eyes of the world; and I could not undertake to look like Ristori.”

“Queen Guinevere—Medora—Dido?”

Miss Hardwicke shook her head.

“I should not think of assuming a character,” she said. “The utmost I could do, would be to

adopt and accurately carry out some old Italian dress, after one of the Venetian pictures."

"The lady in crimson by Bordone, for instance, in the National Gallery," said Mr. Hardwicke.

"No; I am thinking of a portrait at Genoa—a lady dressed in white and gold brocade, with pearls in her hair, and a fan of peacocks' feathers in her hand."

"It sounds charming," said Lord Stockbridge; "but can you trust your memory for the details?"

"No; I must have a sketch made of it, or a colored photograph. There will be time enough; the ball, I see, is six weeks hence."

"Shall I go to Genoa, and get it done for you?"

Miss Hardwicke smiled incredulously.

"What would you do, if I were to say Yes?"

"Start to-night by the mail-train."

"What a paladin! No, my lord, I will not put your chivalry to so severe a test. I know of a certain copyist at Turin who will go to Genoa gladly at my bidding; and I shall have the drawing in a fortnight."

Some question then arose as to the authorship of the original picture, Mr. Hardwicke maintaining that it was a Tintoretto, and Miss Hardwicke being of opinion that it was a Paul Veronese. At last she referred the matter to her note-book, and went to fetch it; Lord Stockbridge holding the door as she passed out.

He stood for a moment, and watched her out of sight; then drew a deep breath, came back into the room, and, laying his hand familiarly on Mr. Hardwicke's arm, said:

"By Jove! Hardwicke, I can not tell you how much I admire your sister. I never admired a woman so much in my life—never, upon my soul!"

"That is saying much, my lord," said Mr. Hardwicke, bowing.

"Not more than I mean—not half as much as I mean, my dear fellow."

"But, having no doubt seen most of the court beauties of Europe—"

"I never saw one fit to hold up Miss Hardwicke's train," interrupted Lord Stockbridge, emphatically. "Besides, it's not only her beauty, egad! it's her style—her style; her personal dignity; what our fathers used to call 'the grand air,' you know."

"Many persons think my sister's manner too haughty," said Mr. Hardwicke.

"Ah, that's just what I like—that *noli me tangere* manner. She's a woman who might be born to the purple, by George! But I've no business to say all this to you, Hardwicke."

"It is very gratifying to my feelings, my lord," replied the merchant, with another bow.

"It's confounded bad taste, any how—but a man can't help speaking, sometimes, when he's in earnest."

At this moment Miss Hardwicke came back.

"Well, is it Tintoretto or Veronese?" asked her brother.

"Neither," she replied. "It is a Palma Vecchio."

And then they talked about painters, and paintings, and foreign galleries, till Lord Stockbridge started up, protesting that he had no idea it was so late.

"Will you dine with us, my lord?" said the merchant.

"Thanks—I wish I could; but I am pledged to some fellows this evening at the club. Miss Hardwicke, pray remember that I'm the most devoted of your slaves—and that I am quite ready to go to Genoa, or Timbuctoo, if you please, at an hour's notice. My dear Hardwicke, pray don't take the trouble to come down with me!"

But Mr. Hardwicke, of course, disregarded this entreaty, and accompanied his guest to the hall. Then, returning to the drawing-room, he closed the door behind him, and, with some appearance of mystery, said:

"Claudia, believe me, I was not mistaken in what I said to you just now."

"But I am sure you are mistaken," Miss Hardwicke replied. "I have not only entered it in my note-book as Palma Vecchio, but I have underlined the passage in Murray. See, here it is: '*Number two hundred and twelve, portrait of a lady—Palma Vecchio.*'"

"Pshaw! I am not speaking of the picture," said Mr. Hardwicke; "but of Lord Stockbridge."

"Of Lord Stockbridge? Surely we have had enough of Lord Stockbridge for to-day."

"That coronet is at your feet, Claudia, if you will but stoop to pick it up."

Miss Hardwicke, deep in the pages of her note-book, made no reply.

"His admiration for you is boundless," continued the merchant. "He told me that he had never admired any lady so much in his life."

Miss Hardwicke looked at her watch.

"The dressing-bell ought to have been rung before now," she said, rising. "I am so glad we dine alone to-day. Are not you?"

"I should have been very happy if his lordship could have staid to dine with us," replied the merchant.

Miss Hardwicke frowned.

"Pray oblige me, Josiah," she said, "by not calling the man 'his lordship.' You are not a footman, remember. And do me the favor not to mention Lord Stockbridge's name again to-night."

Saying which, she swept from the room, leaving Mr. Hardwicke snubbed and discomfited.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SENATOR SHIRLEY SPEEDS THE PARTING GUEST.

DE BENHAM had reason to be satisfied with his bargain. He had bought two thousand bales of the best "Middling Upland" at the rate of five cents American, or two-pence half-penny English, per pound. Now, the ordinary American bale contains about four hundred and eighty pounds of cotton; so that his two thousand bales represented some nine hundred and sixty thousand pounds of the raw material, costing in round numbers twenty-four thousand American dollars, or nearly five thousand pounds in English money. This cotton, he knew, was already worth in Liverpool one-and-sixpence per pound,* and

* The author has been unable to ascertain at what rate "Middling Uplands" was selling in this country during the first summer of the American Civil War. The actual market-price of "Middling Orleans" (which

would rise in value daily. It would realize, if sold at once, a gross profit of sixty-seven thousand pounds; but then, he told himself, the temptation to sell must be resisted. Mr. Hardwicke would be sure to incline toward an immediate sale, and Timothy Knott would be equally sure to urge him upon that course; but De Benham thought he could rely upon his own influence so far as to induce Mr. Hardwicke to adopt, for once, a bolder policy. His brief experience had already shown him that the war must, and would, go on for a long time; probably for years. He knew the power and resources of the North; he had the reckless enthusiasm of the South before his eyes. He saw that every spark of brotherly love was extinct between the belligerent factions, and that they already hated each other with a sound brotherly hatred. That the war should now come to any sudden ending was impossible. The time for reconciliation, or even for compromise, was too evidently gone by. They must fight it out. They were bent on fighting it out. And when a war is carried on, not by two opposing armies, but by two nations in arms, the campaigns are likely to be many, and the struggle is certain to be long.

And therefore De Benham resolved to exert his utmost influence in persuading Mr. Hardwicke to hold back the cotton. The war would go on; and so long as the war went on, the supply of cotton would be cut off. A time must come, he argued, when there would be absolutely no American cotton in the market; and if prices were so high now, when the stock in hand was not yet nearly exhausted, what would they be then? In the course of that memorable conversation, during which he had proposed this present enterprise for Mr. Hardwicke's consideration, he had predicted that cotton would go up eventually to two-and-sixpence per pound; but he believed now that it might go higher still—perhaps to twice two-and-sixpence. Who could tell?

But this was mere wild speculation, not to be acted upon—not even to be spoken in words. Let the cotton once touch two-and-sixpence, or even two-and-threepence per pound, and he would not himself desire to see it held back for a single hour. And then he calculated that, sold at the rate of two-and-threepence per pound, these two thousand bales would fetch £108,000; of which sum, when the five thousand was deducted for cost here in Charleston, £103,000 would remain for expenses and profits.

And besides all this, he meant to run the blockade again, and again, and perhaps again—supposing always that he had luck, and that Mr. Hardwicke was willing to go on. Why should not the two thousand bales become four, or six, or ten thousand? Why should not the profits be multiplied over and over again? Already, upon the single cargo that he had brought in, they amounted to £87,000. Take, say, £80,000 as the probable average profit upon each cargo, import and export alike, why should he not

make five round trips and bring that profit to a total of £800,000?

These were bold dreams; but there was a dream still bolder lurking all this time in a dark corner of his busy brain—a dream which he had not as yet permitted himself to define or dwell upon; but which, if he had chosen to put into words, would probably have resolved itself into some such proposition as this:

His own claim on Mr. Hardwicke amounted already to something over £13,000, and it was reasonable to conclude that when he next ran into Charleston with a similar cargo it would be with a similar result. Granted, therefore, that both the cotton cargoes remained for the present unsold, he would still be entitled, at the end of the second journey, to some £26,000. And then why should he not, with that £26,000, buy a little steamer of his own, hire his own captain and crew, lay in his own cargo, and go on running the blockade for his own exclusive benefit? Supposing that he ran it five times on Mr. Hardwicke's account, with Mr. Hardwicke's money, bringing up the profits to £800,000, his own share at fifteen per cent. would come only to £120,000; whereas with his own boat and his own cargoes he might make three or four hundred thousand for himself alone!

But then there was always the chance of capture; and capture meant confiscation for cargo and steamer, and some weeks of a New York prison for all on board. It was an evil chance that might befall this *Stormy Petrel* this very first trip on her way back to Nassau, and then—Ah, then, indeed, it would be all over with him, and he would have to begin at the first rung of the ladder! Whenever his thoughts reverted to this side of the picture, De Benham would smile a bitter smile, and tell himself that he was like the barber's fifth brother in the dear old story of the *Arabian Nights*—building a palace and marrying a beautiful princess upon the possible profits of a trayful of glass, which is presently kicked down and shivered to atoms!

In the mean while it was important for two reasons that the new cargo should be shipped as speedily as possible—the first reason being that it was now high tide after dark for going over the bar; and the second, that more blockading vessels were rumored to be upon the eve of leaving New York. So De Benham hastened all his preparations, urged on the immediate delivery of the cotton, hired a gang of expert stevedores to pack it, and so got ready for sea in less time than would have been possible in any country where people were not accustomed to live and work at perpetual high pressure.

It was marvelous to see the skill and speed with which these stevedores disposed of the great cotton bales, each bale already reduced by hydraulic pressure to a compact mass, apparently as solid as marble. First, of course, they stowed the hold; stowing the bales the way of the ship's length; laying each bale as regularly and exactly as if it were a block of granite in the hands of the builders; and so covering the whole floor one tier deep, all except an opening under each hatchway. Into this opening they presently inserted wooden "toms" or blocks, to which they applied the patent worm-screw—an agent of tremendous force, by means of which the cotton-bales were driven back into about two-thirds of the space

is the staple most in demand for manufacturing purposes) was not, however, at this time quite so high as 1s. 6d. per pound; though it soon after reached that standard. In October, 1862, it rose to 2s. 8d. per pound in Liverpool; and in 1864, though not generally quoted above 2s. 7½d., did occasionally fetch as much as 2s. 8d.

they at first occupied. The room thus gained was then filled in, and the same process repeated till the whole was packed so close and firm that even a mouse must have been crushed between them, had any sea-going mouse been luckless enough to find its way there. Then, upon the floor thus laid, they built a fresh tier, filling up the hatches last of all, and applying the screw as before, till the hold was quite full and the hatches were battened down. After this, every spare inch between decks was temporarily crowded with cotton; and lastly the spar deck itself was packed, a tier of bales being laid fore and aft, leaving only a narrow lane or two leading to the cabins, the engine-room, and the men's fore-castle; and on the top of this tier another somewhat narrower; and then, still tapering pyramidal as the structure rose, another. When all this was done, and the bales on deck had been firmly lashed to their places, the *Stormy Petrel* looked like a ship roofed in for an arctic winter.

De Benham spent all his days on board while the work of stowage was going forward, but slept at the Mills House, and was so overwhelmed with invitations that he might have dined three or four times over every day between the hours of five and nine P.M. A hospitable, hot-headed people, these Charleston citizens, welcoming the strangers with open arms, and passionately desirous of being favorably reported of "on the other side."

"Tell your countrymen, Sir," said a beautiful girl, Diana Ashby by name, one of three charming sisters, the daughters of a certain Colonel Ashby at whose house De Benham was dining one evening—"tell your countrymen that you saw the Stars and Bars waving over Fort Sumter; and whether they help us or whether they abandon us, there is not a man in the Southern States, nor a woman either, who for the honor of that flag is not ready to die twice over."

"I have five sons in the army," said another lady, on another occasion. "They are all with the Army of the Shenandoah, under General Johnston; and I have a sixth son, who is only sixteen. But, should the war last another year, and should his brothers have all fallen in the course of it, he will then, please Heaven, be old enough to join, and avenge them!"

Such, universally, was the enthusiasm of the women; such, in rougher fashion, was the reckless valor of the men. In the home, in the streets, in the camps, it was every where the same—at night, bands of young men traversing the city, shouting to the tune of "Dixie's Land," or the "Marseillaise;" by day, waving of flags, and marching of volunteers, and eager crowds gathered round street orators, of whom there were scores ready to jump upon an empty sugar-cask, and declaim by the hour together on the smallest provocation. To sober Englishmen full of their own risks and profits, and bent on utterly practical ends, as were the captain and supercargo of the *Stormy Petrel*, it seemed as if they were suddenly landed in the midst of a people one-half of whom were mad and all intoxicated.

At length, all being ready, the time came for starting. The *Stormy Petrel* having taken in her coal, had gone down to a point a little below Fort Pinckney, to be searched and smoked—a process to which every vessel leaving a Confederate port was at this time subjected by the military

authorities. De Benham, not caring to be smoked with his cargo, had been dining with Mr. Shirley, who lived at a place called Hampstead, a little way out of Charleston, in an exquisite little green-shuttered, verandahed, luxurious, bachelor's cottage—a *bijou* of a place, buried in trees; stocked with the choicest books, pictures, and *bric-à-brac* that a refined taste could bring together; and surrounded by well-kept grounds, washed on one side by the waters of the Cooper River, fragrant with magnolia blossoms, and the haunt of humming-birds by day and mocking-birds by night.

It had been a pleasant party, consisting of some ten gentlemen, most of whom were planters and merchants, one the editor of a Charleston newspaper, and all volunteers. They had been lounging in the veranda after dinner, smoking and taking coffee, and talking, as usual, war, politics, and cotton; and now the far-away chimes of St. Michael's Church were heard, and the city clocks struck eight, and De Benham, who had ordered the gig to be round at the steps at the bottom of Mr. Shirley's grounds at that hour, rose to take his leave. His host went down with him to the water-side, where they found the boat in readiness, and the men resting on their oars.

"I shall not soon forget this scene," said De Benham, looking back at the house, with its back-ground of dark trees and its fore-ground of undulating sward studded with beds of scarlet, white, orange, and violet flowers, about which the fire-flies were already flitting in myriads.

"But for you, Mr. Debenham, I think I should never have set foot in the little place again," said the planter. "I am a sickly man, and I was dying by inches when you met me in London. Another month or six weeks in Europe would have killed me."

And as he said this he tried to press a small pocket-book into the young man's hand.

"What is this?" said De Benham, drawing back.

"It contains five thousand dollars—my passage-money from London."

De Benham shook his head.

"I have no right," he said, "as far as my owner is concerned, to refuse your passage-money altogether, but I can not, even on his account, accept such a sum as five thousand dollars. The information you gave me in London was so valuable that, if the ship was my own, I would accept nothing, and yet think myself well paid. As it is, you shall pay whatever is a fair price for a very comfortable passage, and not a cent more."

Mr. Shirley urged and persuaded; but in vain.

"You will accept at least a thousand dollars for your owner, and a thousand for yourself," he said, after offering eight, and six, and five thousand successively.

"I will take two hundred and fifty dollars on account of Mr. Hardwicke," replied De Benham; "and that is far too much. For myself, Mr. Shirley, I can only thank you for your hospitality, and wish you farewell."

The planter colored painfully.

"If you do not accept some little token of my friendship, Sir," he said, taking a ring from his own finger, "I shall fear I have offended you. You won't refuse to wear this for my sake?"

De Benham took the ring without looking at it, and thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

"Not when it is offered in friendship, Mr. Shirley," he said, smiling; "and now it must be good-by; for the clocks have just gone another quarter, and we must be over the bar before midnight."

"Good-by, then, and good luck go with you!"

So they shook hands heartily, and parted. In another moment De Benham had taken his seat; the rowers had bent to their oars; and the gig had shot out upon her way like a sea-bird on the wing.

When he remembered this incident of the ring—which was not till nearly a week after—and took it for the first time out of his waistcoat pocket, he found that it was a magnificent brilliant, large as a large pea, limpid as a dew-drop, and radiant as a little lump of live sunlight.

By half past nine the *Stormy Petrel* was steaming out at a rapid pace in the direction of Morris Island.

The moon, which was but a crescent when they ran into Charleston some ten days before, was now waning, and would go down about eleven. The pilot had, therefore, so timed it that they should slip out a little before midnight with the ebbing tide, and make use of the next four hours of darkness to get as far upon their way as their engines at full speed could carry them. Every moment was, therefore, of importance.

And now, with a clear sky overhead, and the moon growing brighter as the night deepens, and myriads of stars, like diamond tesserae, inlaid the vault of heaven, they speed on toward the coast. Castle Pinckney is soon left far astern, and Fort Johnson is passed upon the right. Then comes the long white front of Fort Moultrie, gleaming ghostly in the moonlight—then Fort Sumter, dark and isolated in the midst of the broad stream, like a monster ship at anchor.

The tide is now running out with a smooth, swift current; the moon is going rapidly down; and a tender, silvery sheen lies upon the water, seeming to permeate the very air, so that the night is scarcely night at all, but rather a denser twilight. And now the moon has sunk quite out of sight; and now it is midnight, and they are fast nearing the mouth of the harbor. Now Morris Island and the sand-bag batteries, where they cast anchor coming in, are gained and left behind. And now the mouth of the harbor lies before them, widening out to the open sea; while yonder, cruising solemnly to and fro about half a mile beyond the bar, loom some six or eight dark hulls, each an armed sentinel.

And now the same breathless suspense, the same silence, the same intense watchfulness as before reigns on board the blockade-runner. Slowly and stealthily, the muffled thump of her propeller beating like an anxious heart, the *Stormy Petrel* crawls on toward the bar, making for the same point between the flag-ship and the blockader next in shore. The pilot's whispered orders come hissing through the still night-air. The captain stands by silent, with folded arms, his eyes riveted upon the Federal ships ahead. A faint creak is audible now and then from the engine-room. A single spark flutters now and then from the funnel. And now, the tide beginning to run low, the *Stormy Petrel* plunges into the surf, scraping and grinding as she strikes the bar—and now she is fairly out; and the whispered order comes, "Full speed

ahead;" and away she flies into the very teeth of the danger, trusting even less to the chance of escaping unseen than to her own speed and daring.

Scarcely, however, has she dashed in between the two outer ships and cleared the line of the cordon, than a rocket shoots up into the darkness from some point about half-way to the shore, is answered by another from one of the more distant vessels, and instantly followed by the prolonged roar of a heavy gun.

"Give her way!" shouts the pilot, all caution being at an end; and now there is a tumultuous rush to the engine-room—the utmost pressure is put on—the propeller revolves at the rate of seventy to the minute—and the *Stormy Petrel* plunges on headlong, making desperate way, tearing up the foam at her bows, and leaving a boiling furrow in her wake.

Nor is her speed put on one moment too soon. Out from the midst of the blockading squadron shoots a small, black, dangerous-looking craft, pouring a torrent of red sparks from her chimney—out from among the sand islands lying off the coast to the right, whence the first rocket rose, rushes another—and now the chase begins in earnest!

"Gun-boats, by God!" exclaims the captain; and the words are scarcely out of his lips before two more shots are fired, one of which passes clean over the ship's bows and splashes heavily to leeward.

"Shift some of this cotton aft," says the pilot, with a stamp of his foot.

And instantly, all of the crew who are not at work below fall upon the cotton-bales, De Benham and the captain lending each a hand, and bear about a score of them away to the only vacant space abaft the funnel. The screws being now more deeply immersed, this increase of weight is followed by an immediate increase of speed; and, laden as she is, the *Stormy Petrel*, with her two powerful engines answering gallantly to the strain, and her boilers all but priming over from the tremendous pressure, soon shows that she is more than a match for her pursuers. On they come; but the blockade-runner distances them at every turn of her screws—they fire; but their shots each time fall shorter and shorter of the mark. And now those two black outlines seem to stand still. They diminish, they grow dim—they are swallowed up and lost in the darkness—and the *Stormy Petrel*, once more out of danger, is alone upon the open sea, and running straight for Nassau.

CHAPTER XL.

LETTERS FROM HOME.

ABOUT forty-five hours after going over Charleston bar—that is to say, about half past ten o'clock P.M. on the evening of the next day but one—the *Stormy Petrel* cast anchor once again in the safe and pleasant waters of Nassau Harbor; having sighted and steered clear of several vessels on the way, but having met with nothing further in the shape of adventure. Then did Mr. Zachary Polter forthwith receive the remaining half of his modest fee; and, late though it was by that time, hasten ashore to render up an

account of himself and his three hundred and seventy-five pounds unto the wife of his bosom. And then, the anchor watch being set, captain and crew and supercargo turned in to sleep as men sleep who for three days and two nights have scarcely closed an eye for five minutes together.

The next was a busy day. The custom-house officers were on board as soon as the sun was fairly up; and when their visitation was over De Benham had out the quarter boat and hastened ashore. He went straight to the post-office, and there found a packet of newspapers and four letters awaiting him—one from Lady De Benham, one from Mr. Hardwicke, one from Archibald Blyth, and the fourth from an old fellow-student hight Franz Kielmann, written in a tiny crabbed German character on the thinnest foreign paper, and stamped with the familiar Zollenstrasse post-mark. He tore open his mother's letter first—a long, loving, anxious letter, of which he did not then wait to read the whole, but, having seen that she was well, turned with some eagerness to Mr. Hardwicke's. The merchant's letter was brief but satisfactory. It ran thus:

"July —, 1861,

"PRIOR'S WALK, ST. HILDEGARDE'S, LONDON.

"DEAR MR. DEBENHAM,—I am duly in receipt of yours dated the — inst. With regard to the proposal conveyed therein, I can only say that I prefer to leave you full discretionary powers, and that I beg you to act according to your own best judgment, and as the force of circumstances may direct. Should you make the round trip successfully, and on your return to Nassau prefer to venture again before returning to England, you are at liberty to do so. You can, in such case, warehouse the cotton for a few weeks in Nassau; and, if you write immediately on receipt of this, I will at once dispatch a sailing vessel to bring off the double lot (i. e., 4000 bales) to Liverpool. Our brig *Sabrina*, just in from Odesa, will answer the purpose; and can take out whatever cargo you may direct, in case you choose to risk a third venture. In the mean while, you will be pleased to forward all bills, etc., received in payment at Charleston or elsewhere, and continue to draw upon us for your further expenses. Should you decide on running the blockade again immediately, you will, of course, require another cargo of such goods as you find most in demand; but this, I presume, you can lay in at Havana.

"Anxiously awaiting your next, and with best wishes for your personal safety and health, I am, dear Mr. Debenham,

"Yours, etc., JOSIAH HARDWICKE."

Now this was a very satisfactory letter—the most satisfactory letter, according to De Benham's views and wishes, that Mr. Hardwicke could possibly have written. Having read it twice through, the young man put it carefully away in his pocket-book, tearing out a leaf at the same time and penciling these words to the captain:

"DEAR CAPTAIN HAY,—In consequence of a letter just received from Mr. Hardwicke, I find it necessary to make arrangements for unshipping the cargo as soon as possible—probably to-mor-

row—so that we may be in readiness to start again by the end of the week.

"Yours truly, T. D."

This he twisted into the form of a note, and sent it back to the ship by the coxswain; and then proceeded at once to use the discretionary power with which, to his great joy, he found himself invested. And so actively did he use it, that he not only succeeded before nightfall in making every arrangement for warehousing and unloading his cargo the following morning, but found time also to write a long letter to Mr. Hardwicke, detailing all that had happened since he left Nassau, and inclosing a rough statement of his accounts, together with such bills and invoices as he had brought away from Charleston.

And then, besides all this (for the English post chanced to be going out that very evening), he scrawled a hasty line to his mother, telling her that he was safe and well, but not coming home for a few weeks longer.

In the mean while all Nassau had again turned out to look at the blockade-runner, which, if she was attractive on the occasion of her first appearance in those waters, was still more attractive now in the *éclat* of success. Row-boats and sailing-boats, filled with curious gazers young and old, black and white, men, women, and children, swarmed about her where she rode at anchor about half-way between the mouth of the harbor and the town. No one, however, was permitted to come on board, and none of the crew had leave to go on shore; so the public curiosity, except in so far as staring went, remained ungratified.

When the day's work was done, and De Benham had gone back to the *Stormy Petrel* and talked over his plans with the captain, he at length found time to sit down in his little cabin and read the rest of his letters. First Lady De Benham's—he had begged her, on leaving home, to remove to a better quarter of London, but he found that she was still in the old Canonbury lodgings. "You wish me," she wrote, "to be in the neighborhood of the parks; but what pleasure would they give me without you? Can I accept additional comforts while you, my own boy, are exposed to hardship and peril? No, dearest, till I have you home again and all these distant enterprises are ended, I prefer to stay in this quiet nook, 'the world forgetting; by the world forgot.' Yesterday I dusted your books and music, and rearranged your drawers. Your desk, and some roses in a tumbler, stand on your little writing-table. Every thing looks as if you had only gone out for an hour or two, and were coming back as usual to tea. I know it is very childish; but I love to have it so—even though it makes me sad." It was a long letter, breathing tenderness in every line, and the young man kissed the loving signature ere he put it away. "Dear—dearest Mutter," he said, half aloud, "there is no one in the world like her!"

And then he read Archie's letter, which was written on office paper and sealed with the office seal.

"PRIOR'S WALK, July —, 1861.

"DEAR OLD MAN,—We are all awfully anxious for your next letter. Old Tim Knott shakes his bald pate and croaks doleful prophecies from morning till night. Cousin Josiah looks grave. We all read the American news as eagerly as if

the credit of the house was at stake; and the fellows in the counting-house do nothing but bet upon you. I have backed you heavily; so you're bound to get through all right, if only for my sake. My six weeks' holiday is just due again. I don't know where to go, or who to go with. It won't be half jolly without you, any how. Charley Bennett is off to Switzerland, and has asked me to join him; but it would cost thirty pounds, and I can't afford it. It's all very well for Bennett, who has a hundred a year more salary than myself, besides what he earns writing theatrical notices for the *Shooting Star*; but it won't do for A. B.

"Wilson's going to be married, and we are clubbing together to give him a dinner and tea service. Jones and one or two others wanted to make it a silver inkstand; but what's the good of a silver inkstand to a fellow who is dipping his quill all day long into a leaden one in a merchant's counting-house? Protheroe's aunt has died somewhere up in the north, and left him a pot of money. You remember Protheroe? Sits at the same desk with me—long-legged chap—red face and prominent eyes—like a lobster. He's a good fellow, though, and no one grudges him his luck.

"But I'm afraid all this 'shop' won't interest you, having been so little about the counting-house, and not knowing half the fellows even by sight.

"The Hardwickses are gone down to Hardwicke Hall—the place in Kent, you know; and a grand old place, too—belonged once upon a time to some favorite of Queen Elizabeth—red brick house all gables and weather-cocks—park, plantations, preserves, and all that sort of thing. Cousin Josiah is a great man down there, and fills the house with visitors every autumn. They gave a great garden party at Strathellan House last week, just before leaving town, and asked me. There were lots of swells—among others a certain Lord Stockbridge, who waited upon Claudia like her shadow. He's at least thirty years older than she is, and has a worn-out, dissipated, disagreeable look about him; but I fancy it will be a match for all that.

"He got her a card of invitation, I heard, to a fancy-dress ball at some grand house in Belgrave Square, a little while ago. You may guess what a swell affair it was, when I tell you the Prince was there. Well, Claudia went, dressed so wonderfully and looking so handsome that his Royal Highness, they say, asked the lady of the house what Queen this was whom she had invited to meet him; I shouldn't wonder if we next heard of her being presented at court.

"I have not ventured to call on Mrs. Debenham since you left. If I thought I could be the least bit useful or pleasant to her, I would go any where or do any thing—but I'm so afraid of intruding. I know she is well, however, for I inquired at the door the other night without going in.

"I wish I just knew where you are and what you are doing at this moment. When I think of you as you were a year ago, playing the organ at St. Hildegard's, and believing in nothing but music, and then think of you out there in the West Indies, running the blockade and getting in the way of all sorts of danger, it seems like a dream. Suppose it actually did turn out to be a dream

all the time, and I was to wake presently and find myself in our old quarters at the 'Silver Trout'!

"By-the-by, I went to see the pictures at the Royal Academy last Saturday afternoon, and who should I come upon but Mr. and Miss Alleyne! He asked after you, and I said you were in the West Indies—not a word, of course, about the blockade. That's one of the things it won't do to talk about just now. They asked me to go and see them at Kensington, and I said I would. I thought she looked as if she would like to hear more about you, but she said nothing. She is paler than she was at Cillingford a year ago, and, I fancy, looks taller. Mr. Alleyne has a splendid picture in the middle room—"The Athens of Pericles"—sold, of course, and to whom do you suppose? Why to no less a person than Josiah Hardwicke, Esquire!

"Now, good-by, dear old fellow. Do send me a line to say how you are, and what has happened to you. I don't want to bore you with letter-writing, but I do want half a dozen words, and will be contented with half a dozen. Take care of yourself, if you can.

"Yours ever, ARCHIBALD BLYTH."

De Benham read the last page of this letter twice over, and then laid it down with a heavy sigh. He had not seen Miss Alleyne since the day when he had met her by the round pond in Kensington Gardens, and that—yes, that was just after Christmas—seven months ago. She did not know that he was in the West Indies. How should she? Well, she knew it now. Archie told her—and Archie thought she looked "as if she would like to hear more." Poor little thing!—grown paler, too—but then she said nothing. Why did she say nothing? Was it pride? Or indifference? She seemed indifferent enough, and gay enough, that day in the gardens. 'Pshaw! of what use to go over all that ground again? And so, telling himself that it was of no use whatever, De Benham broke open the envelope of his fourth letter.

This fourth letter carried him back into a world which he had never forgotten; which he never could forget; but of which he now thought so seldom, that the going back to it thus vividly had in it something that almost startled him. This letter told of the sayings and doings of people whose faces, voices, tricks of manner were once utterly familiar to him. It set him down in the midst of a town where every house-front along the streets and every tree in the public squares wore, once upon a time, the face of a friend. It spoke of the Academy, and as he read he seemed again to tread the well-known floors—of the parish church, whereof the tongue of every bell in the belfrey came back upon his ear as familiarly as the tones of his own voice. It told him that Herr Von Kinkel, the Grand Duke's Kapellmeister, was dead. Herr Von Kinkel dead! How well De Benham remembered him, his wig, his brown coat, the ribbon in his button-hole, the very painting on the lid of his snuff-box! Herr Zschokke had retired from the professorship of classical languages, and gone to live at Freidorf. Fräulein Thimm was married—not to the old Town Councilor Brann after all, but to a certain Doctor Blitze from Berlin, who had lately settled in Zollenstrasse. The little Lyric

theatre in the Fischmarkt had been burned down. The Krone hotel was being rebuilt. A son of Herr Phillipart, the Post Director, had carried off the gold medal for painting in oils last examination, and Bernhard Clauss had written the prize symphony of the year. And then the writer had something to tell of himself also. He had lately been appointed to the leadership of the Grand Duke's private band, and had some hope of succeeding Von Kinkel in the post of Kapellmeister. If this great good-fortune should indeed befall him, the object of years would be attained. He would be in a position to marry, and then what happiness for Annchen and Franz!

"Thou rememberest my maiden, *Lieber Freund*," ran the letter; "she whom thou didst used to call 'the fair one with the golden locks?' She is as fair as ever, and as good, and as dear. We have been betrothed (*verlobt*) for more than four years; and it only needs a little more of assured income on my part to enable us to marry. The little white house with the green blinds at the corner of the Nordlingen Strasse, just outside the Nordlingen Thor, is to be let. If I succeed, I shall hire it at once. It is but a handbox of a house; yet it will be big enough for us. Our ambition soars not high—it is only our love that is boundless. My maiden will have a thousand thalers from her uncle, and I have saved a little money to buy furniture. Heaven grant that the Kapellmeistership may yet be mine! Give us thy good wishes."

By the time that De Benham had come to the end of this last letter the daylight was fading rapidly. Still, however, he staid there, sitting at his desk, his eyes riveted upon the open page, his cheek resting on his hand, his thoughts far distant. Ah, yes—he remembered her so well, "the fair one with the golden locks!" She was the daughter of a small bookseller in the Römer Strasse, and he used to see her almost daily, knitting stockings behind her father's counter. How he used to laugh at Franz Kielmann in those days, recognizing only the ludicrous side of all this wordy, outspoken German sentiment! Well, he felt no disposition to laugh now. He almost envied them their patient, faithful, honest love—their four years of mutual trust—their narrow hopes—their contented obscurity. "Our ambition sours not high—it is only our love that is boundless." Happy, thrice happy, for them that it should be so!

"And I, too—I loved her just like that!" he muttered to himself, with another heavy sigh. But the "her" meant Juliet Alleyn.

Yes; he had loved her "just like that"—for a fortnight or three weeks. He, too, had dreamed that delicious dream, and known that sweet intoxication; but then he had waked wonderfully soon from the dream; and the intoxication, in passing off, had left him soberer than ever. Still there were times when he could not help regretting the sweetness—when he told himself that he did not believe he should ever, ever know the taste of it again. He felt as if it were in him to love but once; and he knew that he had loved, and that he loved no longer. Had things fallen out differently—had they known each other longer, had they been engaged for years, or even months, before that day when he took his solemn vow in Benhampton Church, this change might never have come upon them. Or had his heart

remained untouched for a few years longer, till the great end of his ambition was achieved, and had he then loved some fair and high-born woman—ah, then nothing would have had power to shake him! He should have gone on loving her, and only her, to the end of the chapter. But now—alas! now that sacred fire was all burned out, and only the dust and ashes of it were left. It could never be lighted again, he thought—never, for him. It was not in his nature to love twice. He had dreamed his dream, and waked from it. He had drunk of the cup, and drained it. And now all was over, and he must try not to think of it again. Regrets, self-reproaches, sighs were all useless now, and worse than useless. They could neither bring back the past, nor renew it in the future. Nothing could do that:

"For violets pluck'd the sweetest show're
Ne'er can make to grow again!"

So, for the second time that evening, he put the subject from him, resolving to banish it thenceforward from his thoughts as much as possible. And then, having locked his letters away in his desk, he went up on deck to smoke a cigar with the captain.

It was characteristic of the man—is characteristic, perhaps, of most men under similar circumstances—that he never once reflected upon the fact that all these changes were of his own making. He never reproached himself for what he had done; or, indeed, was conscious that he alone had done it. He felt that life was destined to be somewhat more barren for him in the future, and he pitied himself that it should be so—and that was all. He never thought of pitying Miss Alleyn, having made up his mind that she had long since forgotten, or ceased to care about him. He even felt it a sort of grievance that she should have forgotten him so easily. If any one had dared to tell him in plain language that he, Temple De Benham, had preferred his ambition to his love, and acted heartlessly in this matter, he would have resented it vehemently, and have denied it with as strong a conviction of his own rectitude as when Archie once upon a time accused him of having changed his mind. In all that had happened he saw only the hand of fate—the force of circumstances—the necessities of his own peculiar position, and so forth. That he was in this instance his own fate—that his position was of his own choosing—that his necessities were of his own making, were possible views of the question that never for one single moment occurred to his mind.

CHAPTER XLI

HOW THE WORLD WENT ROUND.

THE world went round faster than she has ever been known to do before or since, in these times of which we are writing; and great events succeeded each other across the Atlantic with a bewildering rapidity that held all Europe breathless. But even this vivid interest ended at last in that sort of jaded indifference with which we may suppose a Roman audience to have regarded the last gladiatorial combats of a long day in the Flavian Amphitheatre. States seceded, armies were levied, battles were lost and won by every

mail; and each fortnightly budget of American news contained matter enough to furnish our daily papers with leaders, paragraphs, and special correspondence for three months together. The audience, however, had, as it were, only just taken their seats in these late midsummer days of 1861; the *prælusio* was only just over; the trumpet had only just given the signal; the real fighting had only just begun. The battle of Big Bethel on the 10th of June, followed within a month by the battles of Carthage, Athens, and Rich Mountain, and by innumerable skirmishes in Virginia and Missouri, inaugurated the terrible spectacle; and even now, while Temple De Benham was for the first time running the blockade of Charleston Harbor, the memorable battle of Bull Run had been fought near Centreville, some twenty-eight or thirty miles southeast of Washington.

News of this "dolorous rout" had but just reached Nassau when the *Stormy Petrel* put in again to unship her cargo. Here, as in England, public sympathy was divided between the two causes; but the majority—as might have been expected, considering their proximity to the Southern States—sided with the Confederates. Nor was the prevailing excitement confined only to neutral lookers-on. There were plenty of waifs and strays from the adjacent coast, as well as a sprinkling of Northerners, in the place, and party feeling ran hot and high between them. On the quays, in the market-place, at the bar of the solitary hotel, indoors, and out-of-doors, throughout the little sea-port town, the talk was all of Bull Run and the war.

"We've whipped them, Sir, as if they were a pack of curs, and they ran away like curs," said an excited Southerner, addressing himself to De Benham; who, far too busy to discuss politics with a stranger on the public quays, was superintending the unloading of his cargo.

"The Army of the Potomac exists no longer, and that's a fact," said another.

"Twenty thousand of them killed and wounded, and the rest gone straggling home all over the country!" chimed in a third. "It's the end of the war, as sure as snakes."

"It ain't no more the end of the war than it's the end of the world," snarled a gaunt-looking Northerner. "I'm a Boston man, I am. I know what stuff our sodgers air made of. If they're whipped to-day, they'll whip the world to-morrow. Yew call 'em curs, dew you? Call 'em curs, if yew like; but yew'll find 'em bars an' panters next time yew hev to dew with 'em. See if yew don't!"

"Reckon you Yankees find tall talking easier than fighting," said the first speaker, contemptuously.

"Reckon we shall give yew darned rebels a lesson in fighting afore we've done with yew," retorted the Yankee, savagely.

And then came a storm of curses, and a scuffle, and the gleam of a knife; and if the by-standers had not rushed in, there would have been bloodshed. As it was, the combatants were separated with difficulty, and De Benham, who dragged the Boston man out by the collar, received an ugly gash across the back of his left hand. A red-faced little English officer came bustling up at the first token of a row.

"Come, come," he said, authoritatively, "we'll

have no civil wars here. This is British ground—if you want to fight, you must go elsewhere to do it. Clear off at once, or I'll have every American present arrested for a breach of the peace."

Whereupon the crowd dispersed and the belligerents went sullenly away—to meet again, and quarrel again before night. Scenes of this description were breaking out a dozen times a day in Nassau while the *Stormy Petrel* remained in port.

The next morning, when De Benham had forgotten all about him, the Yankee came back. Finding the steamer still alongside the quay, the work of unloading still on hand, and the busy supercargo still superintending it, he sat himself down upon a cotton-bale, lit a cigar, and began a conversation.

"Stranger," he said, "yew meant it kindly—but I'd rayther hev fit that fight out."

"They were four to one against you," said De Benham, checking off the bales in his note-book.

"Mebbe," replied the Boston man. "I didn't keown't 'em."

"Besides, you were unarmed, and that tall man had a bowie-knife."

"I'd rayther hev fit it out, Sir, all the same," said the Boston man, reflectively.

"Six hundred and forty-eight—six hundred and forty-nine—six hundred and fifty," sung out the mate on the gangway. And De Benham entered six hundred and fifty in his note-book.

"Tightish work, I gues, Sir, running the blockade?" said the Yankee, presently.

De Benham made no reply. It was a subject that he could hardly discuss with a native of those States whose laws he, a neutral, had just been evading.

"I shouldn't mind dewing a trade with yew for that theer cotton," pursued the other, after a brief silence. "Yew've bought it cheap, I reckon."

"I mean to sell it dear," said De Benham, smiling.

"Wa'al now, I'll buy it at an advance of twenty-five per cent. on whatever yew paid for it—and that's as fair an offer as yew'll git any day betwixt Nassau an' Christmas."

De Benham shook his head.

"If you really conclude that we have run the blockade," said he, "how can you offer to buy the cotton? From your point of view, it has been illegally obtained."

"I don't know that the cotton, as cotton, is any the wuss for that, stranger," said the Boston man, dryly.

And then he tried again to lead De Benham into telling him what price he had paid, what price he would take, and so forth, till the other fairly lost patience.

"I mean to lock the cotton up till it's worth two-and-sixpence per pound in Liverpool," he said at last. "If you like to buy at that price, I will sell it—if not, let us waste no more words on the subject."

The Yankee screwed up his mouth, and gave utterance to a prolonged whistle.

"Sir," said he, "if those air your terms, I guess you'll not trade this side o' the Millennium."

With which encouraging prophecy he rose and walked away.

The next evening soon after sunset the *Stormy Petrel* steamed out again, this time in the direction of Havana. And now, being on their way from one neutral port to another, with no cargo on board, the blockade-runners put boldly out to sea, knowing that they had nothing to fear between Nassau and the Isle of Cuba.

The weather continued magnificent, the sunsets and sunrises increasing in splendor as they neared the tropics, and the heat becoming hourly more intense. By-and-by the little steamer had to make head against the Gulf Stream, and then her progress necessarily slackened. Twice, also, in the course of the second day, was she hailed and brought to by United States cruisers; both of which, however, the captain could easily have evaded had he seen cause to do so. As it was, he ran up the Union Jack, and received the Federal officers with a degree of equanimity that must have been extremely irritating to those sharp-sighted Northerners. At length the *Stormy Petrel* entered the Tropic of Cancer; and a few hours later, steamed into the port of Havana.

In this West Indian Naples, with its wooded hills, its enchanting bay, its dreamy climate, its Spanish-looking streets and promenades, its cathedral, its opera-house, its Plaza de Toros, its cafés, its billiards, its balls, its cigars, and its ices, De Benham lingered not one hour longer than was necessary for the purchase of his new cargo.

The captain and ship's officers, having nothing to do, went on shore and enjoyed themselves. The crew had their "liberty days" in turn. But the supercargo's work was incessant, beginning with the dawn, and never ending till he laid his weary head each night upon his pillow.

His first morning's experience showed him that every thing was done which the Cuban Government could do to foster an exclusively Spanish trade. Spanish wines, Spanish oil, Spanish wares and manufactures were cheap and abundant; while the protective duty on foreign goods was almost prohibitory. As for English fabrics, they would have cost him so much to buy, that he resolved to take in a cargo altogether different from the last. So, in place of Manchester goods, ready-made boots and shoes, and Witney blankets, he bought coarse Spanish woolens of Andalusian manufacture, Cordovan leather in skins, small-arms of Barcelona make, and some 100,000 pounds of gunpowder in barrels. And he took care not to forget the quinine suggested by Major Prideaux. In all this he had to hold his own against the Cuban dealers as he best could; and that was no easy task. Supernatural was their activity in overreaching while yet a bargain was pending; and supernatural was the apathy into which they relapsed when the bargain was struck and it only remained for them to deliver the goods. To haggle, to urge, to threaten, to persuade, to implore—to toil from store to store in the overwhelming heat—to stand by and see his purchases unearthed from the warehouse—to follow them to the quay—to superintend the stowage of them in the hold, was De Benham's incessant occupation in Havana. Thus fourteen days were consumed; and it seemed to him throughout those fourteen days that he was the only busy man in the place. A dreamy, voluptuous, lotus-eating city, where the women dawdled through life in rocking-chairs and volantes,

and every man's career began and ended, apparently, with the smoking of gigantic cigars some seven inches long!

At length, about four o'clock P.M. on the afternoon of the fifteenth day, all being in readiness for the start, their new pilot—a free nigger, black as "blackest midnight"—came on board; and they steamed out again, to the encounter of whatever perils might await them between the coasts of Cuba and Alabama.

For their destination was of necessity determined by their point of departure; and, starting from Havana, the nearest cotton-port was Mobile.

"United States Consul berry 'spicious, Sar," grinned the pilot, pointing with a jerk of his thumb to a dainty little yacht hovering close under Fort Morro, at the mouth of the harbor.

And then De Benham saw that this dainty little yacht mounted the Stars and Stripes, and that on her deck she carried a gentleman who was watching them intently through his double-barreled opera-glass. His observations would doubtless have taken a more active form, had it been in this gentleman's power to communicate his suspicions with sufficient promptitude to any Federal cruiser. But there happened to be no Federal cruiser just then in Cuban waters, nor, indeed, nearer than Key West Arsenal; so his double-barrel proved an inoffensive weapon enough.

Happily for the *Stormy Petrel* and the fortunes of all concerned in her, the blockade of these more southern ports was at first less stringent than the blockade of Charleston and those places abutting on the northern territory. They found the sea comparatively clear till within some fifty or sixty miles of the coast, and then had to change their course not oftener than three or four times before night came on, bringing them the safety of darkness.

Some three hours later they succeeded in slipping unobserved through a straggling double cordon of blockading vessels; and sunrise found them at anchor about a mile from the picturesque, foreign-looking city of Mobile, the third morning after their departure from Havana.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE "SABRINA" MEETS THE "STORMY PETREL."

AGAIN safe, again successful, having run the gauntlet of all those waters lying between Cuba, the Great Bahama Bank, and Florida Reef; having had some two or three narrow escapes also, en route; and having come with the Gulf Stream at a tremendous pace nearly the whole way, the *Stormy Petrel* made her third entry into the port of Nassau one broiling September afternoon, just seven weeks from the date of her departure for Havana. Seven weeks—a short time wherein to have purchased, stowed and transported two full cargoes, and sold one; to have twice run the blockade of Mobile; and to have twice traversed, say at a rough guess, 1200 miles of sea! A short time for the performance of much hard work; some of it within the tropics. A very short time for the gaining of at least one hundred and fifty thousand pounds—and yet long enough to have wrought a sudden and startling change in the little port of Nassau.

"How full the harbor is!" said De Benham, as soon as they had passed the light-house.

"Stress of weather, I suppose," replied the captain. "Atlantic storms, of which we have seen nothing in the Gulf."

De Benham shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said. "Look there!"

And he pointed to a little knot of steamers, one or two very small; one almost as large as the *Stormy Petrel*; some painted gray or green; one funereally black, like a gigantic gondola; all with low raking funnels; all bare of masts, like themselves; all obviously bent upon the same business.

The captain did look—uttered an exclamation—looked again—swept the harbor with his glass, and grimly smiling, said:

"Well, in future, at all events, we sha'n't want for company."

And that was just it. The *Stormy Petrel* was henceforth but one among others. Till now she had been, if not the very first to run the blockade, at all events the first well-appointed boat in the field: but while she was making these first two trips other speculators had waked up to the golden opportunity; other boats had been put into trim for the same purpose; and blockade-running, as a trade, had set in suddenly, in right good earnest. And what a change the new trade had wrought for Nassau! But seven weeks ago, and there were not more than three or four vessels in port; but seven weeks ago, and except when the whole town turned out to stare at the *Stormy Petrel*, or when the band played in the evenings, there would scarcely be seen a score of people on the quays together. And now—now here were steamers at anchor; steamers unshipping their cotton alongside the wharfs; a whole fleet of dingy colliers; merchant vessels taking in the cotton brought off by the steamers; other merchant vessels fresh from Liverpool, Lisbon, or Bordeaux, discharging their own cargoes of goods and ammunition, presently to be retransported for Confederate uses; small boats in shoals plying to and fro—cotton bales piled upon the quays—crowds of busy strangers, stevedores, sailors more or less drunk, with their pockets full of dollars. Yankee spies, sharks, sharpers, and traders of every description thronging to and fro, overfilling the one hotel and all the lodging-houses and taverns in the town, and keeping the little port in a perpetual uproar.

Much of this—of the general press and bustle of business both on shipboard and on land—was plainly to be seen even from the somewhat distant point at which the captain cast anchor; and a very unexpected sight it was in the eyes of all on board.

"Nebber see nuffin like this in Nassau afore, Sar," said the black pilot, scratching his woolly pate in sheer amazement. "Nassau berry dull place. No business—no 'musement—no money. All 'live now, by golly!"

Then De Benham began to look round, wondering whether Mr. Hardwicke's promised ship, the *Sabrina*, were among these numerous arrivals; and then, just as before, he had the quarter-boat lowered, and went ashore for letters. Alas for the mutability of things human! The quays were lined with gazers when last the *Stormy Petrel*, laden with cotton half-way up her funnel, made her appearance in those waters; and a



crowd gathered about the landing-place to greet and question De Benham as soon as his foot should touch the shore. He had felt himself to be quite a hero then; but now it was over. There was no prestige for the *Stormy Petrel* or those belonging to her. The crowd was there, it is true; but it was a crowd *blasé* of blockade-running—intent upon its own affairs—too busy to give more than a passing glance to any fresh-comer, whether man or steamer.

So De Benham landed, feeling that he was a hero in Nassau no longer; but little guessing that there was something better than the popularity of an hour in store for him—little guessing that the first face he should see at the top of the steps, the first voice he should hear in joyous greeting, would be the face and voice of Archibald Blyth.

"Dear old fellow, welcome to Nassau! You didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"Archie!"

"Yes—Archie and no mistake. I've been watching you all across the bay. I was on the point of coming off to you, and then I saw the boat being lowered, and I knew it was best to wait."

De Benham, with unwonted warmth, grasped his friend's hands in both his own.

"You here?" he said. "I can scarcely believe it—it seems too good to be true." And then, a sudden chill of apprehension sweeping over him: "There's—there's nothing wrong?" he faltered.

"Wrong? bless your heart! no. Every thing's right, and every body's right. I've two letters for you, and lots of newspapers—here are the letters; one from Mr. Hardwicke, and the other from Mrs. Debenham. I went up to see her the night before I left London, and she's quite well—never better, she says. Wants you back, of course. So did I—awfully; till I got the chance of coming after you."

"You came out with the *Sabrina*, of course?" said De Benham, as they strolled away, arm in arm, to a less frequented part of the quays.

"Yes—I applied for my six weeks; and then old Josiah asked me when I had heard from you,

and so on, and ended by offering me the trip out here passage free. Wasn't it good of him?"

"It was kind, certainly; and I, at least, am heartily grateful to him."

Archie's eyes glistened with pleasure.

"I'm so glad it isn't a bore to you, my coming in this way," he said, simply.

"A bore!" echoed De Benham. "Dear old fellow, it's worth any money to have you! And now tell me all about it—how long have you been here, and what have you been doing?"

"Well, I've been here nearly a week, and I've done nothing but sit in a cold bath all day and eat ices. Good Heavens, what a temperature! I never knew what heat meant before."

"You should try Cuba," said De Benham.

"Thank you—Nassau's enough for one while. But the voyage was delightful. Commend me to a sailing vessel, I say. Why, the *Sabrina* came over the sea like a swan! There she is—riding at anchor—that graceful-looking three-master out yonder, with the red and white pennant at her main-top."

De Benham examined the ship through his glass. It was a capital glass, bought at Havana, and would have served him at thrice the distance to criticise the gilded water-nymph, and read the words, "*SABRINA—LONDON*," which glittered on the good ship's prow.

"Must you go back in her?" asked De Benham.

"Not if you can give me any thing to do," replied Archie, eagerly. "Hardwicke said if I found I could be useful to you, I might stay as long as you wanted me."

"That's fine! And I can give you plenty to do. You shall be supercargo's clerk—I've wanted one badly enough, the whole time."

"I'll be any thing you please," said Archie, radiant with delight.

And then they talked of Temple's adventures, and of the war, and of all that had happened since they parted. Archie had the latest news to tell, and from him De Benham learned how Fort Hatteras had been taken by General Butler on the 29th of August, with a loss to the Confederates of seven hundred prisoners and one thousand stand of arms.

"It will be a protracted struggle," said De Benham. "All desperate daring on the one side, all dogged resolve on the other; but the South must go down, and the North must win, in the long-run."

"We don't think so in England," said Archie.

"You will think so when you have made the next run with me to Charleston," replied the other. "You will see why it must be so. The Confederates are splendid fellows; but there will come a point beyond which their resources can not carry them. Now the resources of the North are practically inexhaustible; and besides that, your Yankee is made of that indomitable stuff that never knows when it is beaten."

And then he told Archie of the Northerner whom he had seen attacked by four Southerners upon that very quay; and who, though menaced with a knife and himself unarmed, would fain have "fit the fight out," let the odds be what they might.

"And yet," he added, laughing, "that same fellow would have bought up my first cargo of cotton without caring one jot for the breach of

the law. By Jove! here's the man himself. Did you ever see such a thorough Jonathan?"

"He's coming to speak to you," said Archie.

"Ah—he wants to propose a 'deal' of some sort, depend on it."

The Boston man came up, grave and business-like.

"Wa'al, Sir," he said, "I reckon yew find some difference in this port since your last visit. Nassau has become the centre of a new trade, Sir—an illicit trade; but a trade that will increase, Sir, every day. No nation on a'ir, Sir, can effectually blockade three thousand miles of coast."

"There must, no doubt, be points at which such a blockade will be inoperative," said De Benham.

"Sir, it is impossible it should be otherwise. In the mean while, foreseeing that this port is likely to be pretty crowded for some time to come, I hev laid down a patent slip at Victoria Creek—jest round that pint yonder, about a mile from whar we air standing. If your vessel wants refitting or repairing at any time, Sir, I shall be happy to dew my best for you."

And with this he gave De Benham his card, bowed, and walked away.

The young men burst into a roar of laughter as soon as he was out of hearing.

"And that," said Archie, "is Yankee patriotism! What's the fellow's name?"

"Wilbur H. Sakem."

"Then I should think Mr. Wilbur H. Sakem will find himself rather strictly dealt with, if ever his Government chances to hear of this little speculation!"

"Ay, but you must not think, because he can not resist making dollars when dollars are to be made, that our friend is devoid of patriotism," said De Benham. "Ask him to repair a Confederate boat, and he would refuse, though it were the best bargain ever offered. Tender payment in Confederate bank-notes, and he would not touch them with a pair of tongs. Pit him against any number of armed Confederates, and he would not only fight them, but, like the doughty warrior in the old ballad, if his legs were both shot off, he'd fight upon his stumps."

"You make him out to be a hero!"

"Because the vein of heroism is actually there; imbedded, perhaps, in much base metal, but still there—an inherent part of the man's nature. Ay, and inherent not only in the nature of Wilbur H. Sakem, but inherent in the whole universal Yankee nature, which is more to the purpose."

"But what about the worship of the almighty dollar? There is nothing very heroic in that."

"Well," replied De Benham, "there is even a symbolic element mixed up with the worship of the almighty dollar. Dollar is power, and power is national greatness—so, even here, patriotism is touched at a tangent. The truth is, Archie, that those littlenesses and absurdities which we love to classify under the head of Yankeeisms are for the most part mere surface-traits, after all, and overlay much that is admirable. The more a man sees of the American people, whether Federal or Confederate, Northerners or Southerners, the more clearly he recognizes the generous, the fearless, the patriotic—nay, I am not afraid to say the heroic, side of their national character."

Talking thus, now of great public questions, now of events and persons interesting only to themselves, the friends strolled to and fro under the trees in the promenade till nearly sunset, and afterward dined together at the hotel—now crowded, and noisy, and exorbitantly dear.

"You've no idea what it will cost!" said Archie, dismayed, when De Benham ordered a private room, and called for terrapin soup, canvas-backed ducks, and other rarities entered (unpriced) upon the bill of fare. "I dined here the first day, knowing no better; but I have never dared to repeat the experiment. I had to pay five dollars for a chicken, a plate of stewed oysters, and half a pint of sherry. A bottle of Champagne, I am told, costs twenty-five shillings."

De Benham laughed.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I don't care what any thing costs. We will have Champagne and Château Margaux, too, every day we are in Nassau, though the price should be double twenty-five shillings a bottle. You are my guest, you know, and I must make much of you. I am a rich man now."

And for the first time he tasted the pleasure of wealth. It was delightful to see Archie's honest face at the other side of the table—to spend money on him—to fête him—to have him for a guest. Never had he felt that he loved his friend so well. Never had friendship in itself seemed so good and pleasant to him. A man might be forced to renounce love. Many men were forced to renounce it, and did renounce it, missing it, and living solitary all their lives through. But no man was called upon to renounce friendship. That treasure—the treasure of Archie's friendship, so faithful, so devoted, so unselfish—was at all events his own, to have and to keep while he deserved it. And he resolved that he would deserve it. He resolved that he would be good to Archie, as good as he knew how to be, his whole life long.

"It was the pleasantest surprise I ever had, old fellow, seeing your face to-day at the top of the landing-place," he said, presently. "*Trinquons donc*. What is it that Béranger says?"

"L'amitié qui trinque pour boire,
Boit bien plus encore pour trinquer!"

And then they chinked their glasses across the table, once, twice, thrice. Not for many and many a month had Archie seen De Benham so gay.

CHAPTER XLIII.

PERILS ON SHORE.

To go back to Charleston—hospitable, excitable, Madeira-consuming Charleston—seemed to those on board the *Stormy Petrel* like going back into the society of old friends. It was, however, a pursuit of society under difficulties; and the difficulties, as they speedily discovered, were much greater than on the occasion of their first visit. If bold blockade-runners had increased and multiplied, so also had the blockading squadron become more numerous and more vigilant. These vessels, which cruised off the coast by day, drew in round the mouth of the harbor, forming a close double cordon, at night; while up and

down, between and about them, hovered a swarm of gun-boats, swift, wasp-like, carrying for the most part only a single gun, and so small as to be invisible beyond gunshot range after dark. An elaborate system of signals by means of colored lights was now also established throughout the squadron; so that except on very dark or foggy nights, a blockade-runner was beset by dangers. Still, despite these dangers, the race increased and multiplied, and, on the whole, prospered. Some, of course, were captured; some, to avoid capture, were run ashore and fired by their own crews; some, though detected and pursued, escaped by dint of sheer speed and daring. But the majority, being purposely constructed for the work, succeeded, at all events, in making several runs before their day of disaster came upon them. So enormous were the profits to be made upon all that a boat carried in, as well as upon the cotton she brought out, that it paid well in these days only to make two round trips in safety and suffer for it on the third.

The *Stormy Petrel*, however, having taken in the cargo brought by the *Sabrina*, and being once more confided to the skillful pilotage of Mr. Zachary Polter, started bravely upon her third trip, nothing daunted by the additional perils of the way. Nor had her good luck yet deserted her. Thanks to her build and a moonless night—thanks, also, to the misfortunes of a fellow blockade-runner, which was being hotly chased in an opposite direction just at that critical moment when the *Stormy Petrel* was making for the bar—she again got through triumphantly.

Then came Charleston quays; Charleston soldiering; Charleston hospitality and universal good-fellowship. Then, also, came the old business of selling and buying, unshipping and stowing, all over again. Had it not been for the excitement of danger at sea and fortune-making on shore, De Benham would soon have wearied of it. As it was, the details of the trade, the chaffering and bargaining, were infinitely distasteful to him. There were even times when he found himself on the verge of being bored. Still no man, however uncommercially disposed, can incur much risk of boredom when he is making money faster than he can count it; and De Benham calculated that he was now earning at the rate of more than twenty thousand pounds a month.

"It is a magnificent life," said Archie, to whom every thing was new and delightful.

"It is a life of great excitement, and great uncertainty," replied De Benham.

"Awfully jolly, though—regular game of speculation!"

"Well, it is the roulette table, *plus* the Parrott gun, the overcharged boiler, and the New York prison. You may call that 'awfully jolly.' I don't. It is not pleasant to be always running away, in the first place; and it is extremely disagreeable, in the second place, to serve as a mere target for long-range practice without firing a single shot in return."

"Why shouldn't you carry an Armstrong, and return their little compliments now and then?" asked Archie, innocently.

"Because, my dear fellow, that would constitute piracy on the high seas, and we have no mind to be hung."

In the mean while, Archie amused himself from morning till night. The dinner-parties, the iced drinks, the brass bands, the marching to and fro, the very cotton and cotton-stores charmed him with all the charm of novelty. Having nothing to gain and nothing to lose, the risks of the run only added to the pleasure of the excursion; and not even the New York prison—supposing it were indeed his fate to be lodged there—would have troubled him much; at all events as regarded himself. Would he not, in such case, see New York for nothing?

De Benham, as the commercial representative of a great London house, found himself fêted wherever he went in these times—fêted at Havana; fêted at Mobile; but nowhere fêted so cordially and persistently as at Charleston. The South Carolinians had lost none of their gay self-confidence since he was last among them; but were still boasting loudly of Bull Run, and prophesying victories to come. Touching their losses at Fort Hatteras they said little, and seemed to care less. Their hospitality, at all events, was as profuse as ever. Besides, they never forgot that De Benham first ran the blockade of their harbor in quest of the cotton for which they then had no other buyers; or that it was on board the *Stormy Petrel* that one of their leading citizens found a safe passage home from England. Archie, who came in for his share of all the pleasant things going, never went into so much society in his life as during that delightful fortnight in Charleston.

Especially agreeable to them both was the house of Colonel Ashby, who was a near neighbor of Senator Shirley and a great man in the War Department. Now Colonel Ashby was a widower and the father of three daughters, all cultivated, all young, all swift in repartee and fearless in conversation, as American ladies are wont to be. Their names were Janet, Elinor, and Diana. Janet was the youngest; perhaps also the least attractive. Certainly, the least brilliant. Elinor and Diana were both very beautiful, after that delicate, highly-wrought, spiritual type which we in England are only just beginning to recognize as the special inheritance of Transatlantic womanhood. And they were not only very beautiful, but they were very much alike, and both enthusiastically patriotic. But of the beauty and enthusiasm of Diana Ashby, some brief mention, it may be remembered, has already been made in these pages.

She it was who said that, whether England came to them as an ally or held aloof as a neutral, there was no man, "or woman either," in all those Southern States, who for the honor of the Stars and Bars was not ready to die twice over. De Benham had often thought of those words since, and of how her eyes darkened and flashed as she spoke them; for Diana Ashby's eyes changed color strangely at times. They were superb eyes, too—large, luminous, unfaltering; and, for their color, of a deep, clear gray, inclining more to blue than brown. Yet there were moments when that bluish-gray vanished from them altogether, and they became quite black—black as the blackest Spanish eyes that ever glowed under a mantilla. This transformation, however, only came upon them in flashes, and never for any topic save that of her country and her country's cause.

To hear Diana Ashby's low, clear voice once more, to watch for the faint color rising in her cheek, and for the coming of that strange black lightning in her eyes, were not among the least pleasant of De Benham's anticipations when again the flood tide carried the *Stormy Petrel* over the bar of Charleston Harbor.

It has been said that there were pleasant things going in these days—excursions to the camps and batteries, luncheon parties, dinner parties, evening parties, and the like; and, somehow, De Benham contrived to find more leisure for such outings than heretofore. At Havana, to be sure, his work was difficult, and at Mobile he was among strangers; while here he could rely on the promptitude and good faith of Messrs. Harper, Prideaux, and Barbackle, and those connected with them. At all events, he now went a good deal into society—especially into the society frequented by Colonel Ashby's daughters.

One evening—it was at the Ashbys' own house, after dinner—Archie revealed the fact that De Benham could play. He revealed it to Janet, the youngest of the sisters, with whom he had fallen into a way of turning over photograph books, loitering in conservatories, and talking confidential chit-chat—that sort of pleasant chit-chat that means nothing, but is, perhaps, therefore all the pleasanter.

"Play?" said Janet Ashby. "What does he play?"

"Any thing—every thing—Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn—whatever you put before him."

"Then the piano, I suppose, is his instrument."

"Yes—and the violin; and the organ. And then he extemporizes—you should hear him extemporize!"

"But your friend must be a genius, Mr. Blyth!"

"He is a genius—that's just it," replied Archie, warmly. "And he's not only a musical genius—he's a great linguist; and he has the most extraordinary talent for commerce. You can't think, Miss Ashby, what a wonderful fellow he is!"

"He is very fortunate, whoever he may be, if all his friends appreciate him so thoroughly," said Elinor Ashby, coming up behind her sister's chair. "May I ask where this genius is to be found?"

"It is Mr. Debenham, Nelly," replied the other. "Mr. Blyth says that he is such a great musician—do ask him to play."

So Elinor Ashby went up and asked him; and De Benham, who had scarcely touched an instrument of any kind since his abandonment of the profession, would fain have excused himself.

"I am out of practice," he pleaded. "I have not played for months."

But then Diana Ashby added her entreaties to those of her sister, and he yielded.

He played first a wild prelude of John Sebastian Bach's—a stormy, impetuous torrent of notes followed by a chain of ponderous chords that crashed out, one by one, upon the ear, like the falling of forest trees smitten by the tempest. Then, leading away into a lighter measure, he ended with a capriccio by Chopin; one of the daintiest, airiest, most fantastic inventions of



"HE PLAYED FIRST A WILD PRELUDE OF JOHN SEBASTIAN BACH'S."

that ethereal genius—a capriccio that Ariel might have played amidst the charmed glades of Prospero's island, or Puck and his fellows have gamboled to by moonlight, for the delectation of Nick Bottom, the weaver. And still, as his fingers fled over the keys, lacking none of their wonted fire or facility, De Benham felt the old, passionate, inborn love of his "so-potent art," the old God-given inspiration, welling up in his heart—welling up imperiously, irresistibly, with a yearning that was almost pain. And with it also came that glowing sense of power that goes with all really fine playing, and is the player's own exceeding great reward.

So, having once begun, he felt that he would gladly have gone on for hours; and he rose from the piano with a sigh. But they would not let him leave off so. They implored him to resume his seat, and begged for more.

"Play something of your own, Mr. Debenham," said Diana Ashby.

"I fear I can remember nothing."

"Let your fingers remember for you."

"Ah, that would never do! If I were once to let my fingers have their own way, they would run off with me altogether; and Heaven only knows when they would stop. Perhaps never!"

"We are quite ready, Sir, to take the consequences," said Colonel Ashby, laughing. "We'll naturalize you, in that case, as a citizen of the Confederate States."

"I think you would have the worst of the bargain, Colonel Ashby," replied De Benham, with an involuntary glance toward the beautiful Diana.

It was possible, certainly, he thought, to conceive a harder fate.

Then, being again entreated, he played "Dixie's Land," their own much-beloved Southern melody: making it the theme of a marvelous improvisation—such an improvisation as none there present had ever heard before—now giving it out simply and plaintively, like the singing of a sorrowful, solitary voice; now appareling it in harmonies "rich and strange," and treating it as a solemn chorale; now breaking it up into detached phrases; playing with it; inverting it; chasing it from key to key; dressing it in all kinds of fanciful disguises; overlaying it with dazzling cadenzas; and working it up at the last into a grand triumphal march, in which his breathless listeners seemed to hear the tramp of battalions and the chanting of victorious thousands.

When he had done, there was silence—silence for some seconds; and then his hosts and their friends came crowding round the piano, all thanks and eager admiration. Diana Ashby, however, said nothing. She waited till the rest had said their say; and by-and-by, when they were all occupied with other matters, and the servants were handing about iced coffee, she turned to De Benham and said:

"It seems almost sacrilegious, Mr. Deben-

ham, that you, an Englishman, should be able to interpret our national music in this wonderful way. Only one of our own people ought to stir our hearts like that."

"What reply can I make to such a compliment?" said De Benham.

"I think we are bound to impress you, for the sake of the cause, whether you will or no—naturalize you, as my father suggested, and turn you into a citizen of the Confederate States."

"But I am one, in a certain sense, already," replied De Benham. "The artist is a citizen of the world."

"Of the Old World, I fear," she said, quickly. "Of that world which was the cradle of the arts—not of our New World, with its material needs and its efforts after material progress."

"Well, the artist, perhaps, takes but a languid interest at all times in mere material progress—I mean in that sort of progress that is represented by steam-plows, baby-jumpers, and sewing-machines; but he sympathizes with patriotism and self-devotion, wherever they are to be found."

"It is sympathy that we covet," said Miss Ashby; "that, above and beyond all else."

And then she turned to the old subject of the war, and of the feeling with which it was regarded in England, and of the reasons why the English Government should, must, and ought to come to the aid of the seceded States.

"It is for your interest to do so," she argued.

"Nations, like individuals, sometimes overlook their interests," said De Benham, seeking refuge in generalities, but wishing with all his heart that the lady would not drive him to talk politics.

"Not commercial nations, when their commercial prosperity is at stake!"

"Our commercial prosperity does not hinge upon cotton only," said De Benham, smiling. "Besides, that is not all. Setting questions of interest aside, our people and our pens are alike in favor of peace."

"Yet but a few years ago you took up arms for the Turk, with whom you have nothing in common—neither blood, nor religion, nor commerce; and it was only yesterday that your volunteers were mounting the red shirt in Sicily. Whereas we are your own kith and kin, speaking your own tongue, descended from your own Cavaliers, inseparably connected with you in a thousand ways—to say nothing of growing the cotton which gives employment to millions of your people."

De Benham groaned in spirit. He was so weary of being reminded of those odd millions of cotton operatives!

"But that is nearly all true of the Northerners as well," said he. "They also are of our own blood—they also speak our language—with them, also, we maintain a great international trade."

"You are a Unionist, Mr. Debenham," exclaimed Miss Ashby, her cheek flushing, her hand grasping the chair-arm, in act to rise.

De Benham looked at her, almost silenced—not by her indignation, but by the splendor of her beauty.

"Indeed, no," he said. "I am speaking impersonally—putting my own opinions altogether aside, and trying to show you in what different lights this question may be viewed on the other

side of the Atlantic. There are many reasons why we English should hesitate to plunge into a great war. There is the terrible cost in blood and money; there is the still further check to our commerce; there are our Canadian colonies to be defended; and—"

He hesitated. He could not utter the thought that was in his mind. He could not say to her: "Gallant and chivalrous as you are, descended from old English Cavaliers as you are, cotton growers as you are, your cause is stained with the sin of slavery; and on the side of slavery we may not, and will not, fight." It was impossible that he should say this to Diana Ashby; so he broke off abruptly.

"And your sympathy for us is not strong enough to outweigh all those considerations," she said, bitterly.

"Not at present," he replied, "if I may judge from the tone of such English papers as I have seen of late."

"Well, we can but go on as we have begun—alone. And we shall go on, to the last breath."

And with this, she rose and swept away into the next room; and De Benham felt that some shade of displeasure against himself was mingled with the bitterness of her speech and the manner of her departure.

A few minutes later, when the guests were all taking leave, he again found himself for a moment alone with her.

"Miss Ashby," he said, "you must not mistake me. I was speaking just now for England—not for myself."

"What would you say, then, Mr. Debenham, if you spoke for yourself?" asked the lady.

"I would tell you that I am not a free man; that my hands are tied; that I am vowed to a duty which it will consume all the best years of my life to fulfill, and to which every other consideration must yield, for me. But I would also tell you that if it were not for that sacred obligation—if my life were my own to fling away; which it is not—then I would mount the palmetto-tree and draw my sword for the Stars and Bars to-morrow."

"Would you, indeed, do this, for my dear country's sake?" she exclaimed, eagerly.

And as she spoke, that look came into her eyes, that dark and dazzling fire, taking away his breath and his prudence together.

"I would do it—at all events—for yours," he said, dropping his voice almost to a whisper.

Miss Ashby colored crimson, and, Archie coming up at that moment to make his bow, she wished them both, somewhat formally, good-night.

"That Janet Ashby is the sweetest girl I ever saw in my life," said Archie, enthusiastically, as they walked back to their hotel in the moonlight.

"Beware, my friend, beware of pitfalls," replied De Benham. "The sweetest girl that breathes in Charleston city must be the sourest of sour grapes for thee—or me."

"I don't see that," said Archie.

"No? Would you be prepared, then, to turn Confederate for her; or to run the blockade each time you paid her a visit?"

"Well, no—not exactly."

"Neither would I, my dear fellow. Perhaps,

on the whole, it is as well that we must be off again to-morrow night. These beautiful Southerners are dangerous neighbors."

And then, for the rest of the way, he went singing:

"If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?"



CHAPTER XLIV.

THE FORTUNE OF WAR.

DE BENHAM was right when he said that it was perhaps well for Archie and himself that they should be off again on the morrow. Men who live with "one foot on sea and one on shore" become, by the mere force of circumstances, more susceptible than other men to the influence of such bright eyes as they chance to encounter on *terra firma*; and it was by no means desirable that either should suffer himself to be slain by the bright eyes of a *demoiselle* Ashby. De Benham, at all events, had no mind to be so slain. Next to the misfortune of being captured by a Federal cruiser, no accident that could befall him would, as he well knew, so impede his labors and mar his prospects as an engagement, or any thing approaching to an engagement, with Diana Ashby. Her lover, of all men, must be devoted, like herself, to her country's cause; must, most unquestionably, mount the palmetto-tree and fight for the Stars and Bars. No alien would have a chance with her—unless, indeed, he became, in very truth and earnest, a naturalized citizen of the Confederate States. This De Benham knew that he would never do. He knew that he would never lay down his coronet, renounce his ancient title, give up his native England and every hope of winning back the fiefs and lordships of his ancestors, for any eyes, blue or black, transatlantic or otherwise. No; not if they were the brightest that ever rained influence on knight or poet. It behooved him, then, above all things, not to fall in love with the eldest

Miss Ashby—and he felt that he was fast drifting that way. It was, indeed, well that he should be off and away before he drifted farther.

And now they were again on the point of starting. Hitherto all had gone well with them—so well that the ship's crew began to boast that the *Stormy Petrel* was born to good luck, and proof against all those perils that blockade-runners were heirs to. Two round trips had been made in safety, and the half of another. Three full cargoes of miscellaneous stores had been sold at an almost fabulous rate of profit. Two of cotton were even now on their way to Liverpool, on board the *Sabrina*; and a third was just bought, stowed on board the *Stormy Petrel*, and ready for the run. The blockade-runner, it is needless to say, had in the mean while paid her expenses ten times over. It was no wonder that captain and crew, highly salaried as they were, should exult and make merry.

This time, however, De Benham felt more than commonly anxious, and even somewhat depressed. Diana Ashby counted, perhaps, for something in the matter. He told himself that she certainly did so, and that he was a fool for his pains. He would not for one moment allow, even to his own thoughts, that his depression had in it any thing of that vague uneasiness that goes by the ugly name of evil presentiment. And yet, in his secret heart, he would have given much to put off the start for just twenty-four hours longer. Had any cause for doing so presented itself, his relief of mind would have been great. Could he even have devised any reasonable pretext for delay, he would have put that pretext forward, and have acted upon it unhesitatingly. But with these unacknowledged presentiments and anxieties, Diana Ashby's eyes (bright as they were, and reluctant as he was to turn away from the sphere of their brightness) had substantially nothing whatever to do.

By eleven A.M. of the day following the events last related, the *Stormy Petrel* had taken in her coal, and gone down to the old point below Castle Pinckney to be searched and smoked as before. At six P.M. they were to weigh anchor, so as to be ready to go over the bar as soon as it was dark. In the mean while Polter had to go to head-quarters to get posted up in the signals; and for De Benham there were papers to be signed, farewell visits to be paid, and so forth. Among the farewell visits, last on the list, but certainly not last in importance, came that which was due to Colonel Ashby and his daughters.

Colonel Ashby was from home, but they found the ladies in the garden—a charming garden, all grass down to the water's edge and dotted over with clumps of spreading trees; yet less like a garden than a corner taken from a well-kept English park. And there were rocking-chairs, and pieces of matting, and a table covered with books and needle-work, set out in the shade. De Benham thought, as the black footman ushered him and Archie across the lawn, that he had never seen a more exquisite picture than was made by this group of beautiful young women sitting together in their white dresses, with the deep gloom of the trees behind them, the green grass at their feet, and the glowing sky above. It was a picture that might have been painted by Watteau or Lancret; or, better still, by gentle English Stothard.



"COLONEL ASHBY WAS FROM HOME, BUT THEY FOUND THE LADIES IN THE GARDEN."

"But it is not good-by for long," said Elinor Ashby, when, after sitting for some little time, the visitors rose to say farewell. "You are only going to Nassau?"

"We are only going to Nassau," replied De Benham; "but our boat must undergo certain necessary repairs before we venture on another trip; and while that is being done, I hope to run home to England for a week or so."

"But you will come out again when your boat

is ready, and then we shall see you back in Charleston?"

"If the blockade does not in the mean while, become too stringent. I have heard rumors of a stone fleet to be sunk across the mouth of the harbor."

"Do not believe it, Mr. Debenham," exclaimed Diana Ashby. "They dare not do it!"

"The question, I fear, is not whether they dare

do it, but whether they can do it," said De Benham.

"Then be assured that they can not do it—that we will not suffer them to do it. Do you think, Mr. Debenham, that our Southern men will stand passively by and see our noble harbor—God's own gift to those who go down to the sea in ships—destroyed forever?"

"Not, certainly, if the most dauntless galleon on shore can prevent it."

"You mean that we want a naval force; but we shall have our own iron-clads and gun-boats before long."

They were now strolling toward the house, and De Benham, pausing for a moment as if to look back at the view over the harbor, contrived to linger somewhat in the rear.

"Will you not give me something before I go?" he said, presently. "Something to keep—I will not say, to remind me of the happy hours I have spent here, for I shall need no reminding. I shall remember them all my life—perhaps only too well."

"Nay, what can I give you, Mr. Debenham?" asked Miss Ashby, smiling.

"A flower—a glove—a scrap of your handwriting. Any thing you will!"

"You shall have a photograph in which we are all three grouped together, like the Graces, or the Fates, or, if you prefer it, like the Witches in 'Macbeth.'"

"I shall be most thankful for the photograph, Miss Ashby," said De Benham; "but—but I also want something which shall be of you, and from you, alone. May I—forgive my presumption!—may I have that little knot of ribbon from your sleeve? See—it hangs only by a thread."

She blushed—hesitated—but complied.

"They are the Confederate colors," she said. "Let them remind you, not of me, but of my country's cause."

Then, without giving him time to reply, she called her youngest sister to her side, and begged her to fetch two photographs—one for each of the friends.

Archie received his with profuse thanks and protestations, making no secret of the regret with which he said good-by.

"I'm sure I don't know how I should go away at all," he said, "if it were not for the hope of coming back again. Tell me, Miss Janet, what I shall bring you from England. Do, please, say something—and let it be something that I shall have a deal of trouble to get. The more trouble it gives me, the better I shall like it!"

To which Janet Ashby, of course, replied at first that she wanted for nothing in heaven or earth; but confessed at last, after much entreaty, that it was the desire of her heart to possess Mr. Tennyson's autograph. Whereupon Archie vowed that it should be hers, though he walked thrice round the Isle of Wight with peas in his boots to get it.

"Unboiled, you know," he added. "No hedging, by Jove! All on the square."

In the mean while De Benham, having said farewell to the two others, was holding Diana Ashby's hand—holding it, indeed, much longer than the business of leave-taking demanded; and much faster, too, as if fearing she would withdraw it. But she made no effort to do so.

"Good-by," he said, reluctantly. "Good-by, Miss Ashby. Pray do not quite forget me."

"Good-by, Mr. Debenham," she replied. "All good fortune attend you!"

"And you—and you, dear lady."

He fancied that her voice wavered. He glanced round; saw that the others were already at the gate; saw, too, that none were looking; bent low over her hand; whispered, "Forgive me!" raised it to his lips, and turned precipitately away.

"I never was so sorry to leave a place in my life!" exclaimed Archie, when they had gone about a quarter of a mile on their road back to Charleston. "As for Janet Ashby, I'd—I declare, I'd do any thing for her!"

"A dangerous frame of mind for any man to be in!" said De Benham, thinking of his own peril.

"But isn't she charming?"

"My dear fellow, they are all charming—so charming that, if we get through this time, I think I'll never venture over the bar of Charleston Harbor again!"

"You don't mean that?" said Archie, with a look of dismay.

"Most positively."

"Then where will you go for the cotton?"

"To Wilmington. It is simply taking up our head-quarters at the Bermudas instead of at Nassau; and, from all I hear, Wilmington is easier of access, now, than Charleston. But, hark! that was five o'clock, and we are due on board at six."

As they were due, so they were on board to the minute; and found a group of Charleston friends waiting to wish them farewell. Among these were Colonel Ashby, Major Prideaux, and Senator Shirley—the latter armed with two huge boxes of choice cigars, one for De Benham, and the other for Archie.

"If there's smoking in Paradise," said he, "these are the cigars you may expect to find there. And, Mr. Debenham, I have been blocking up your cabin with a case of that old Madeira that you liked the other day at dinner. No—no—pray do not thank me! you should have six dozen dozen of it, if you could spare the stowage. *Bon voyage!*"

Then they shook hands warmly all round; and the visitors, with much waving of hats, pulled off in their own boat. By a quarter past six the *Stormy Petrel* was once more under way.

Now it happened that the tide was low this evening, and that the navigation of the boat, owing to some shifting in the sandy bed of the estuary, was more than usually difficult. From off Cumming's Point and along the beach of Morris Island, they were keeping as near in under the land as possible, and taking soundings the whole way.

"It's the darndest river for sand in all creation," said Mr. Zachary Polter, savagely.

"Take another cast, mate!"

The mate obeyed, and sung out: "Twelve feet and a half!"

"Twelve feet and a half—look at that now! One hour later, and we couldn't hev got her threw nohow. Here's six channels, and—"

"Twelve feet!" sung the mate.

"About she goes!—six channels, and nary one with more than eleven foot of water at low

tide—nor that to be keownted on! 'Another cast, mate!'

And so, with the pilot grumbling and growling, the mate casting the lead, and the dark fast gathering about her path, the *Stormy Petrel*, following the sinuosities of the Main Ship Channel, wriggled her way slowly and painfully out as far as the sand-bag batteries; and then made ready for her final rush over the bar.

And now it was night—cloudy overhead; somewhat raw and damp; with a faint breath of northwest breeze coming and going; and a boil of foam upon the bar. Looking out anxiously ahead, it seemed to De Benham that the blockading squadron formed an almost continuous chain.

"There are more cruisers yonder than when we came in a fortnight ago," he said, addressing the captain.

"Not a doubt of it."

"And three times as many as when we made our first venture."

The captain nodded.

"We oughtn't to have all these bales on deck," he said, gravely. "The boat's one mountain of cotton—we're safe to be seen."

"Do you think so? Shall we put back, before it is too late?"

"It is too late," said the captain; "we're on the bar."

As the words left his lips, the *Stormy Petrel* plunged into the surf—struck the bar—recoiled—seemed for one brief instant to stand still—righted—plowed forward, grinding her keel into the solid masonry and shuddering through all her timbers—and slipped off into deep water.

"Ten minutes later, and we couldn't hev done it—not for all the dollars on airth!" exclaimed the pilot. "And now, I guess, them chaps down below must show what their injines air made of."

So, trusting wholly to good speed and good luck, the brave little boat rushed out toward the open.

But instantly, as if from beneath her very bows, a fiery thread shot up, comet-like, through the darkness, and broke into a crimson star high overhead; and then, for the first time, they saw that they had all but run over a tiny row-boat lying just outside the bar. Quick as the answering flash of a duelist's pistol, a blue-light broke simultaneously from three points along the line of the cordon. The row-boat (already left far behind) then sent up a green rocket; and those on board the *Stormy Petrel* saw some five or six large vessels immediately hastening to their encounter.

"Stop her!" shouted the pilot.

And the boat, going then at a headlong pace, stopped suddenly, like a pointer.

"Reverse one injine!"

A creak—a wrench—a strain, like the straining of a desperate swimmer swimming for his life—and the blockade-runner spun round, and made again for the bar. Over she dashed, as it seemed by mere force of speed and steam; and in less than four minutes from the moment of running out was back again on the safe side of the surf-line.

Then Mr. Zachary Polter rose into a towering passion.

"It's all along of their busted signals," said he, dancing up and down the deck with rage, and stringing his sentences together with volleys of

the choicest transatlantic oaths. "They've fixed 'em up into a regular code, as plain as talking; and now we shall hev to lie snug for the next three or four hours, till the tide turns, and they've forgotten us a bit—daru 'em!"

"But why didn't you make a rush for it, pilot?" said De Benham, half angrily.

"Make a rush for it, and them ahead of us?" exclaimed Mr. Polter, with inexpressible scorn. "Perhaps, Sir, you'd like to send 'em a note next time, just to say we air coming? No, Sir—if we'd only bin 'tother side of the line I'd hev shown them the cleanest pair of heels they ever saw in all their busted lives; but I ain't partial to suicide, whatever your taste may be. Cap'n, I'll thank you for a tumbler of cold brandy and water—pretty powerful. My nerves air considerably upset."

The next three or four hours went by slowly and heavily. The *Stormy Petrel* drew off as close under the batteries as the excessive shallowness of the water would permit; and there lay, waiting. Captain and crew, supercargo and pilot, were alike disappointed and annoyed. It was their first failure—their first stroke of any thing approaching to ill luck—and they knew not how to put up with it. The captain, to soften matters, ordered out a double allowance of grog.

At length, between half past one and two o'clock A.M., Mr. Zachary Polter gave the word, steam was got up again, and they prepared for another start.

The tide was now setting in with a strong, eager current; and against this current the good boat had to make head. So far, circumstances were against her. But, on the other hand, a light mist had come up with the morning, and there were already fourteen feet of water on the bar—important facts in their favor.

And now all seemed destined to go well with them. Gliding noiselessly above the bar, they saw no signal-boat this time, and were seen by none. The mist, though so slight and transparent, helped to veil them from observation, as it also helped to veil the enemy from their sight; and it was not till they were actually darting through the cordon that they could see, looming vaguely to right and left of their course, the shadowy outlines of two large ships of war. Their own gray-green hull and piled-up cotton bales matched too nearly, however, with the waves and the mist to attract attention; and they flew out to sea, unchallenged.

"We sha'n't see New York for nothing this time, by Jove!" laughed Archie, exultingly.

"I'm not so sure of that," replied De Benham. "We've lost three hours of darkness, remember; and it will be broad daylight at four."

It was broad daylight at four—the sun shining, the mist clearing, the sea just ruffling before the breeze. About five, the breeze freshened, and blew off the last shreds of fog. Then from three voices at once—the voices of De Benham, of the first mate, and of the watch in the crow's nest—there went up a sudden cry of: "Steamer, ho!"

And there, not four miles distant, was a large paddle-wheel steam-sloop, on their larboard bow.

The pilot rushed to the speaking-tube; the captain to the engine-room; and the good boat leaped under the sudden access of pressure, like a racer under the spur. At the same instant, the cruiser ran up the Stars and Stripes, wheeled

about to give chase, and sent a shot clean over her bows.

"Pitch them cotton-bales overboard!" shouted the pilot.

And over went the cotton-bales—the precious cotton-bales, worth perhaps fifty, perhaps sixty, pounds apiece—splashing into the sea as fast as the combined efforts of every man on deck could heave them over the gunwales; splashing and plunging like lead—rising and floating like feathers—and left behind in an instant.

Meanwhile came another shot—and another—and another; all too well aimed to be pleasant.

Suddenly, just as the blockade-runner was beginning every moment to make more and more way, something like a slight shock—a concussion, as it were, that seemed for a moment to thrill the deck beneath their feet—was felt by all on board. Then, before they had time to ask themselves what had happened, the ship's pace slackened—she came to heavily against her helm (i. e., lurching half round), and lay broadside to the chase.

The pilot flew to the stern; the captain came rushing up from the engine-room, breathless, with the perspiration streaming down his face.

"In Heaven's name, what is the matter?" cried De Benham, seeing them both hanging over the gunwales.

"Matter enough, I guess," replied Mr. Zachary Polter, bringing out his words slowly and savagely, and shutting up his glass with a click.

"One of them darned cotton-bales has got tangled in the starboard screw! We air cooked this time, and no mistake about it!"

And so it was. Swept under the starboard counter by the force of the waves, one of the ejected cotton-bales had been caught in the sweeping blades of the screw. In a moment it was ripped open, and bagging, roping, and cotton were being whirled and twisted about the shaft. In a moment the screw was hopelessly clogged, half the boat's speed was gone, and the game was up!

De Benham turned an appealing look to the captain; but the captain only shook his head, and folded his arms. At this moment the cruiser fired again twice—one of her shots tearing through the water not a dozen yards in their wake.

"There ain't nothin' for it but to lay tew with a good grace, cap'n," said the pilot.

De Benham heard, turned on his heel, and went aft in silence.

Archie followed him.

"Dear old chap," said he, the tears in his honest eyes, "I am so sorry!"

For a moment De Benham looked away—gnawing his mustache; listening with a heavy frown to the shrill rush of the escaping steam.

"I expected as much," he said, at length. "I felt, before we left Charleston, that we should come to grief this time. But, there!—it's nobody's fault."

"It's awfully hard," said Archie.

"It's the fortune of war," replied De Benham, bitterly.

The *Stormy Petrel* was now lying passively to, just swaying with the swell of the sea; and they could already hear the approaching clatter of the cruiser's paddle-wheels.

"It might have been worse," continued De

Benham, more to himself than to Archie. "It might have happened the first time—still, I wish we had got through this once."

Then, muttering again that it was "the fortune of war," he went into his cabin and shut the door. He could not endure to be present at the surrender.

CHAPTER XLV.

IN DURANCE VILE.

WHEN De Benham came out of his cabin, he found the Federal commander, accompanied by two of his officers, a detachment of marines, and some twelve or fourteen seamen, already in possession. Said commander—a fine, bronzed, bearded, authoritative man—turned an eagle eye upon the new-comer.

"Who are you, Sir?" he asked, sharply.

"I am the supercargo," said De Benham.

"Part owner?"

"No, Sir."

"And this young man?" pointing to Archie.

"Supercargo's clerk."

"Good. Where is your pilot?"

Mr. Polter, his hands in his pockets, his quid in his cheek, stepped forward.

"Wa'al, I ain't ashamed of myself noways," said he. "I'm the pilot."

"What's your name? Where do you come from?"

"Zachary Hannibal Polter—Martha's Vineyard—Massachusetts."

The Federal captain turned toward his men.

"Put that rebel in double irons," he said.

Mr. Zachary Polter gave his quid a twist, screwed up his mouth, and submitted.

Then the Federal captain again addressed himself to De Benham.

"Have you any specie on board?" he asked.

"About eight hundred dollars."

"Paper securities? Bills of exchange?"

"Some—on London and Liverpool houses."

"Produce them—and the specie. Lieutenant Kissick, accompany the prisoner, and see that he conceals nothing." Then turning to Captain Frank Hay: "And you, Sir; have you any gunpowder on board? Any munitions of war?"

"None whatever."

"Hand over your papers."

The captain of the *Stormy Petrel* went to his cabin for the papers, followed by the other Federal lieutenant. In the mean while the captain of the cruiser had the whole crew up one by one, asking each man his name, age, and nation, and then sending them, two and two, below the gangway, to be handcuffed. This done, and the others having returned upon deck, he took possession of the money, and glancing over the ship's papers, said:

"You are all Europeans, it seems—except the pilot."

"We are, Sir," replied Captain Frank Hay.

"So much the better for you—so much the worse for him. I shall send you all to Philadelphia, to be dealt with according to law. Lieutenant Kissick, I leave you in command of this vessel."

So saying, he went aft, and leaning against the binnacle, conversed with his lieutenant for some minutes in a low voice; giving his orders, appar-

ently, and looking across every now and then toward his prisoners. He was then seen to hand over the ship's papers and De Benham's papers into the custody of the new prize-master, himself retaining only the specie; and then he prepared to be gone.

One by one, passing through a double file of marines at the head of the gangway, the crew of the *Stormy Petrel* were then conducted down the ship's side, and removed in two large boats already waiting to convey them to the Federal steam-sloop. All were thus drafted off, excepting only the chief engineer, two firemen, the pilot, Archie, De Benham, and the captain.

Twelve seamen were then told off from the crew of the man-of-war, all armed. These, together with a huge Mexican creole named Manuel, who, being master's mate on board the sloop, was now deputed second in command, remained as prize crew on board the blockade-runner, under Lieutenant Kissick.

The first watch was then set; the engineer and firemen were sent below under charge of an armed seaman; the ship's head was put about to the north; the Stars and Stripes were run up; the lieutenant and mate took off their hats; and the captain went back to his ship.

"Keep that rebel in irons, Mr. Kissick!" were his last words, as the boat pulled off.

"Ay, ay, Sir," replied the prize-master.

And then the prisoners on board the *Stormy Petrel* were left alone with their captors.

It was a weary day for them—a weary, heavy, listless day; the air raw; the sky dull; the good boat crawling dismally along at the rate of about eight knots an hour. At two o'clock P.M. they, going northward, repassed within a few miles of Charleston Harbor, sighting many vessels on the way, most of which were Union cruisers. With these they exchanged signals. No more doubling and feigning now—no more speed—no more excitement! All dull, plodding, cheerless work, with captivity at the end of it.

Archie, who could not by any possibility continue melancholy for long together, plucked up his spirits in the course of an hour or so, and chatted quite pleasantly with the mate and the prize-master. But Captain Frank Hay, who had lost his command, and with it the best pay he had ever touched in his life; and De Benham, who knew that the blockade-runner and her cargo would inevitably be confiscated, did not even affect to shake off the gloom and bitterness of their thoughts. But of the two, De Benham's thoughts were the gloomiest and the bitterest. Captain Hay might get himself appointed to another blockade-runner. The trade was increasing; and his previous experience would be in his favor. But De Benham knew that Mr. Hardwicke would never be brought to repeat the speculation. Besides, his own personal loss upon this very cotton now on board amounted to ten or twelve thousand pounds. But even that was as nothing compared with all that the capture of the *Stormy Petrel* entailed upon him in the loss of prestige, of future opportunities, of his employer's confidence.

As for Mr. Zachary Polter, sitting heavily ironed, in a dark little hole between-decks under lock and bar, with only his own apprehensions to amuse him, he was, perhaps, in the worst case of any.

Toward evening, the prize-master and mate being busy in the captain's cabin, going over the supercargo's books, the ship's papers, and so forth, the three prisoners at large—De Benham, Captain Hay, and Archibald Blyth—found themselves alone on the after-deck with only a single seaman pacing to and fro, and the man at the helm. The cook was standing at the door of the galley, in his shirt-sleeves, smoking his pipe. Some five or six of the crew were gathered about the windlass, listening to a long yarn which was being spun by one for the entertainment of the rest. Two others were coming and going, sweeping down the decks, and so forth. In short, it was just that twilight interval during the dog-watches when the crew are all on deck, and those who are off duty enjoy their only hour of leisure in the twenty-four. With the exception of the seaman on guard in the engine-room, the whole of the prize crew were now above deck; but only two of these were on the after-deck, near the prisoners.

Lieutenant Kissick, it should be mentioned, had appropriated the captain's cabin, while Manuel, the master's mate, had installed himself in De Benham's.

"Archie," said De Benham, "go and talk to that Yankee, and take off his attention. I have a word to say to the captain."

Archie did as he was bidden, and the two others, leaning listlessly, as it were, over the bulwarks, exchanged a few rapid sentences.

"Captain Hay," said De Benham, in a low eager voice, "this is a great misfortune; but is it beyond remedy?"

The Cornishman looked at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you and I, Mr. Blyth and the pilot, Davis the engineer, and the two firemen, make seven. Seven against fourteen."

A dark flush mounted to the captain's swarthy brow; but he said nothing.

"It seems to me," continued De Benham, "that there are always six of these men off duty and six on; and the six off duty keep below in the fore-castle."

"Of course they do—port watch and star-board watch. That's the rule."

"Then it would be easy at any moment to let down the hatches and secure the six below; and we seven ought to be a match for the rest, including mate and prize-master, the helmsman, and the seaman on guard in the engine-room."

"We're not seven, though. Can't count Davis or the firemen—they're tied to the engines. Can't count Polter—we couldn't set him free till the job was done. Say three."

"Well, say three. Three against eight. We ought to be able, even so, to recover the command of the ship."

"I'm ready to try, any how," said the captain. "There's my hand on it."

"And there's mine. Hush! here's the mate."

The creole came up at this moment from the cabin—a huge, lumpish giant of a man, with gold rings in his ears, and an habitual scowl.

"What are you talking about there?" he said, suspiciously.

"Well, Señor Manuel," said the captain, "we're wondering how you mean to stow us to-night. You won't put us in the fore-castle, I hope, along with the men?"

"You'll have to go there or nowhere, I reckon."

"I'd far sooner stop on deck," said De Benham.

The Mexican grinned contemptuously.

"You must go where the master chooses to put you, Mr. Supercargo," said he, with an oath; and so turned on his heel and began pacing the after-deck, keeping his eye upon the trio, however, and passing so close at every turn that they dared not exchange another syllable.

Presently eight bells were struck; the first night-watch was set; the man at the helm and the man in the engine-room were relieved; and the master came on deck. He then ordered a blanket and a piece of matting to be thrown on the floor of the galley, and Captain Hay was locked in with the pots and pans for the night. This, however, was a concession to his rank. De Benham and Archie had no alternative but to go down among the men.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CASE OF MADEIRA.

In a little vessel built for speed, like the *Stormy Petrel*, where every inch of space was precious, it may be supposed that the men's quarters were small and comfortless enough. Now, however, they were more than usually crowded, for even the fore-castle was blocked up with a pile of cotton-bales in the midst, so that there was scarcely room to move round in any direction. The atmosphere, too, was fetid and unwholesome; and there was a nauseous smell of tar and bilge-water about the place which made it almost unbearable. As for De Benham and Archie, they stretched themselves upon the cotton-bales, and there lay, scarcely closing their eyes for a moment the whole night through. At four A.M., when the morning-watch was called, they were allowed to go on deck, thankful for the fresh air and the gray dawn; thankful that the night had gone by and the day was at hand.

In the mean while De Benham had spoken to Archie of his plan of recapturing the vessel, and Archie was wild to begin without the delay of an hour. When De Benham told him that there must be a delay of many hours, perhaps even of a day or two; that every thing must be done under the advice of Captain Hay; and, above all, that it would be better not to make the attempt at all than to make it prematurely and so fail, Archie chafed with impatience, and accused his friend of overcaution. Then De Benham told Archie that he was hot-headed and rash; and so sharp words were spoken on both sides. But it was not easy to quarrel in whispers; and all this took place in the course of the night, in pitch-darkness, as they lay on the cotton-bales with six Federal seamen snoring within a few feet of them. So they snarled at one another for a moment, and went on deck at dawn of day better friends than ever.

They had been up nearly two hours before the cook released the captain and took possession of the galley. He came out, however, rubbing his eyes, having slept profoundly. At seven bells breakfast was served; the three deck prisoners

faring the same as the prize-master and master's mate. The prize-master and mate, however, took their meals together in the little closet styled by courtesy the captain's cabin; whereas the prisoners had theirs served out to them in wooden pannikins called "kids," and ate on deck. At a few minutes before noon Kissick and Manuel brought out their sextants for the purpose of taking an observation. As the sun crossed the meridian eight bells were struck; the new sea-day began; and the cook, having first supplied the prize-master's table, served out the dinner.

"There goes poor old Polter's allowance," said Archie, as the cook went by presently with a key in one hand and a "kid" full of pea-soup and salt junk in the other. "I wish one could give him a bottle of wine to keep his heart up."

"By Jove!" exclaimed De Benham, "there's that case of Madeira."

"Ah, it's theirs now, confound them," said Archie.

"I don't believe they've even noticed it, shoved away as it is under my standing bed-place."

"Then don't enlighten 'em," said Archie, sitting cross-legged on a coil of yarn, with his "kid" between his knees, eating away vigorously. "Don't enlighten 'em, if you love me. They wouldn't give us a single bottle, depend on it."

"I shall enlighten them, nevertheless," replied De Benham; "and they shall be welcome to drink the whole case. Madeira is heady stuff, and it's thirsty weather."

Captain Hay shook his head.

"No use, Mr. Debenham," said he. "Those Northerners can swallow any amount of wine, and be none the worse for it."

"Well, if it only puts them into good-humor and throws them a little off their guard, it will be always something gained."

So De Benham waited till the Mexican came on deck, and then, knowing they had dined, went and knocked at the door of the cabin.

"Lieutenant Kissick," he said, "I come to ask a favor. There's a case of capital Madeira under the bed-place in my cabin, and we prisoners find it hard work to keep up our spirits—have I your permission to open a couple of bottles?"

The prize-master, who was leaning back in his chair, smoking, with his feet on the table, sat up on hearing this.

"A case of Madeira!" said he.

"Yes—three dozen of it."

"That's the best news I've heard to-day. Yes, Mr. Supercargo, open a couple of bottles for yourselves, and welcome—and send the case in here."

So De Benham and Archie dragged out the case, prized it open, extracted a couple of bottles, and sent the rest to the captain's cabin. Manuel, pacing the after-deck with his glass under his arm, eyed them curiously, but said nothing. Presently, being summoned by one of the seamen, he went to the prize-master's cabin, leaving the messenger in his place. And then the prisoners, eagerly listening, heard from time to time the drawing of corks and the sound of laughter and loud talking. By-and-by Manuel came out, looking flushed and bazy, and went to his cabin; but Lieutenant Kissick, no whit the worse for aught that he had taken, came aft, and swept the horizon with his glass.

"Mr. Supercargo," said he, "that's jest about the best Madeira I ever tasted. Where did you get it?"

"It was given to me by a gentleman in Charleston," replied De Benham.

"A darned rebel, whoever he may be," said the prize-master; "but a good judge of wine."

"It may be," said De Benham, "that he is a good judge of wine because he is a rebel."

"How so?"

"Because your rebel is generally a man who dares to think for himself; and the man who dares to think for himself is likely to be a fair judge of many things. Of justice, for instance; and political rights. Perhaps of beauty; most likely of wine."

"But not of his own interests, Sir," retorted the prize-master. "He's an on-common bad judge of that article, any how."

At this moment they were joined by Captain Hay.

"Well, Mr. Kissick," said he, familiarly, "what is the position of the boat?"

"Somewhere off Cape Hatteras, Sir," replied the prize-master.

"There's a folding-chart in the locker in my cabin," said Captain Hay, "if you would like to prick off her position."

"Wa'al, now, I rayther should," replied the American, "if yew hev it handy."

"I can find it in a moment," replied Captain Hay, leading the way. "Come along."

So the Federal lieutenant followed, and De Benham brought up the rear.

"You have done justice to three bottles, at all events," said the latter, seeing the empty bottles and the two glasses still upon the table.

The prize-master laughed.

"Yes," he said, "that Madeira raly is worth drinking. But Manuel had the lion's share; and now I guess he can't keep his eyes open. Can't yew find the chart, captain?"

"Yes, here it is."

And Captain Hay, after some fumbling in his locker, brought out a large map in a leather case, and spread it upon the table.

"Now you want the compasses," he added.

"Mr. Debenham, will you oblige me by reaching down that case of instruments from the shelf behind the door?"

De Benham shut the cabin door, as if to get at the shelf; exchanged a rapid signal with the captain, and slipped the bolt.

"What's that?" said the prize-master, turning sharply round.

But instantly his arms were pinioned behind by Captain Hay, and De Benham was standing over him with an iron belaying-pin snatched from behind the door.

"Silence!" said the supercargo, in a low, hurried voice. "Submit, and you shall be well treated—utter one cry for help, and, by Heaven! it's all over with you."

The Northerner darted one desperate glance at the door—another at the window—struggled for a moment fiercely but silently—and then, finding resistance useless, desisted.

"Now, look here," said Captain Hay, gripping his elbows back with a grasp of iron; "it's no good struggling. We're resolved to get back the command of this boat; and we don't care a straw for our own lives, still less for yours. Will

you give in quietly, and submit to be gagged and handcuffed; or must we knock your brains out?"

"You're two to one against me," muttered the prize-master, through his set teeth.

"Then you yield yourself prisoner?"

"Under protest."

"Mr. Debenham, you'll find a gag in that locker. Now, Sir—open your mouth."

Livid with rage, the Northerner opened his mouth hesitatingly and unwillingly.

"Now the handcuffs."

De Benham found the handcuffs in the same place, and in another instant their prisoner was helpless and speechless, the gag between his teeth, and his hands made fast behind his back. Then Captain Hay snatched off his own black silk neckerchief, and with it lashed the prize-master's feet securely together. This done, they laid him on the floor, and there left him.

"And now," said De Benham, "for the mate!"

"Let's see first if we can't find a weapon or two. Where's Kissick's revolver?"

"Here—under his pillow."

"That's right—keep it yourself. My bowie-knife's enough for me."

Thus armed, they locked their prisoner in, took the key, and went on deck. For the supercargo's cabin, it will be remembered, was just opposite the galley, with the funnel and a mountain of cotton-bales between; and of this cabin the creole had taken possession.

They found the door ajar, and, listening outside, heard by his breathing that he was asleep. They could also hear the cook whistling and cleaning up in the galley close by. De Benham pushed the door softly, and peeped in.

"Hush!" he said. "He's lying on my bed—fast asleep."

They opened the door an inch or two farther, crept in, closed it behind them, and slipped the bolt as before. The bolt was rusty, and creaked; and the sleeper stirred uneasily. Awake, he was not pleasant to look upon; but sleeping, he was hideous.

Half on, half off the little narrow bed, he lay with his head hanging over, the veins on his forehead all swollen and knotted, his eyes partly open, his tawny throat uncovered. His cap had fallen on the floor; his belt was unbuckled; and his revolver lay on the table beside him.

Stealthy and noiseless as a cat, the captain stole forward and seized the pistol. It was of the same make as the prize-master's, and carried six shots.

The man was such a giant, and looked, in his sleeping strength, so formidable, that for a moment they paused, not knowing how best to secure him.

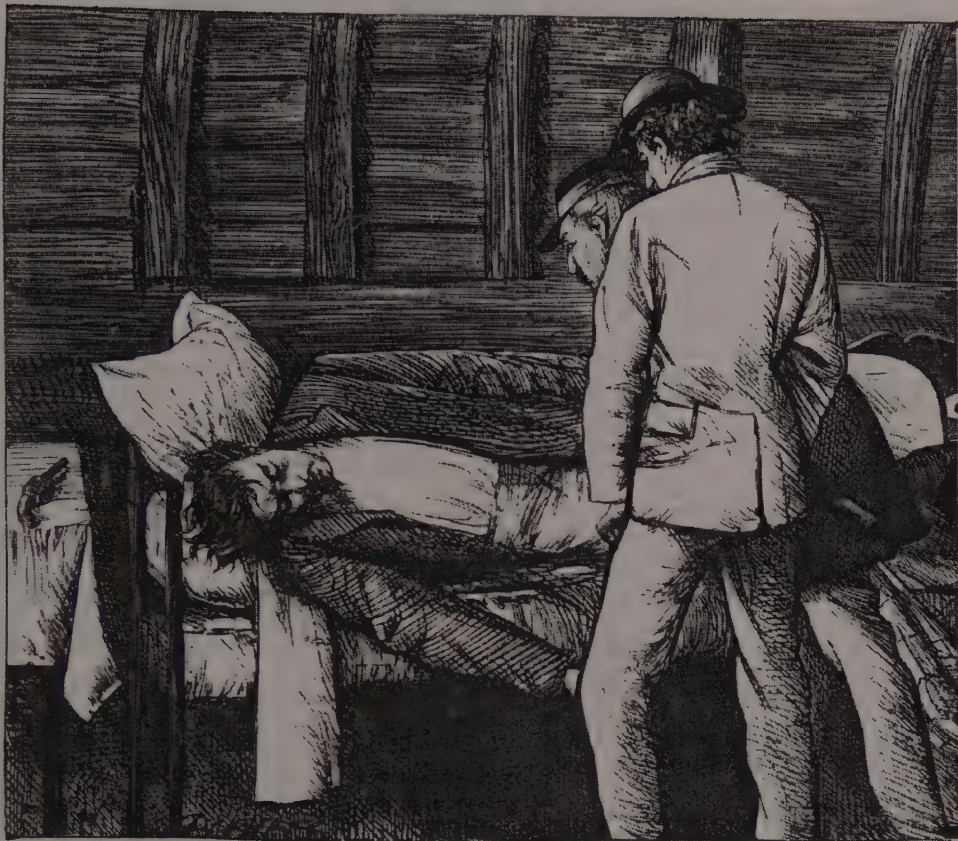
"Knock him on the head with the belaying-pin, and stun him," whispered the captain.

But De Benham could not bring himself to strike a sleeping man.

"Better muffle his head in something, and then tie him hand and foot," he answered, looking round for some cloth or curtain for the purpose. But there was nothing—nothing but the counterpane, which, kept up at only one corner by the foot of the sleeper, was dragged nearly off the bed, and trailing on the floor.

"Give me your bowie-knife," whispered De Benham.

The captain gave him the knife. It was about fourteen inches long, and as sharp as a razor.



"HALF ON, HALF OFF THE LITTLE NARROW BED, HE LAY WITH HIS HEAD HANGING OVER."

With this, kneeling on one knee, De Benham then began, cautiously and quickly, to cut the counterpane away. Captain Hay stood by, ready with the belaying-pin in case of need.

Suddenly the creole opened his eyes. As suddenly, before the light of recognition had time to come into them, the iron descended on his head with a dull thud—there was a gurgling sob in his throat—a convulsive quiver of the limbs—and then deathlike unconsciousness.

"You have killed him!" exclaimed De Benham.

"Not a bit of it. His skull is as thick as an elephant's. Look sharp. He'll be all right again before we know where we are."

Quick as lightning, they tore the counterpane into strips, and bound him to the frame-work of the bed—bound him hand and foot, ankle and wrist, with a strong band over his chest as well; so that, giant as he was, he should not be able to stir one hair's-breadth. And then, for they had not a second gag, De Benham took from his desk a large lump of India rubber about two inches square, rolled it tightly in a folded handkerchief, and, while Captain Hay forced the locked teeth apart, fixed it firmly between them, and tied the ends of the handkerchief behind the man's head.

"There," he said, "I don't think that will interfere with his breathing. I wish he would come to!"

"He'll come to soon enough," replied the captain, coolly. "And now, the sooner we can set

Polter free the better. Where the devil has he stowed the key of the cuddy?"

"The cook has it," said De Benham.

"The cook had it, and the cook took it back again. It was in the mate's keeping, of course—and here it is, in his waistcoat pocket. Now hide your revolver."

They buttoned their coats over their revolvers; locked the Mexican in, as they had locked in the prize-master; and went aft to reconnoitre. Here they found Archie chatting with the watch; one man in the crow's nest; one at the helm; and one holy-stoning the deck. These, with the guard in the engine-room and the cook in the galley, made up the six on duty.

"We're going to have a glass of Madeira in the prize-master's cabin, Mr. Blyth," said Captain Hay, loudly, that the men on deck might all hear him; "and you are to come with us." Then, turning to the helmsman, "how's her head, mess-mate?" he asked, good-humoredly.

"North, half west, Sir," replied the seaman, touching his hat.

Captain Hay went up to the binnacle, glanced at the compass, looked round at the sky, muttered something about a change in the weather, and turned as if to go to the prize-master's cabin. Passing the seaman who was on his knees holy-stoning the deck, he tapped him on the shoulder and said: "Look here, my man, there's a packing-case in the scuttle that's to be taken to Mr. Kissick's cabin. Just call the cook to help you carry it, and I'll show you where it is."

The man jumped to his feet with a ready "Ay, ay, Sir," and ran to fetch the cook, who came out rubbing his hands on his trowsers, and redolent of onions.

Captain Hay opened the scuttle-hatch, and bade the men go in. It was a dark hole of a place, where the crew of the *Stormy Petrel* had been used to keep their old junk, chafing gear, and so forth.

"We don't see nary packin'-case, Sir," said the cook, doubtfully.

"It was there," replied the captain, "a week ago. Go on to the end, and open your eyes a bit wider."

The men went on, stooping as the roof sloped lower. And then suddenly the hatch was clapped on, the hatch-bar was drawn, and they were prisoners, in pitch-darkness, out of sight and hearing.

"That makes four," said De Benham.

"Ay," said Archie; "but there's ten more to come!"

Six out of the ten, however, were down in the fore-castle, off duty. They could hear them, talking and laughing loudly among themselves; and De Benham, stooping cautiously forward, could see one man leaning with his back against the ladder, smoking.

"We've not a moment to lose," whispered the captain. "It's seven bells past, and at eight they'll expect to be called. Now, Mr. Blyth, bear a hand!"

So Archie and he took up the heavy hatch; while De Benham, standing ready with the bar, gave the word.

"One—two—three."

At three it came down, like the stone at the mouth of a sepulchre, followed by a shout and a rush of feet below.

"Quick—the bar!" cried Captain Hay, jumping on the hatch, and dragging Archie with him.

"By Heaven! they'll have it up in spite of us!" And as he spoke the trap heaved beneath their feet.

Then De Benham also sprang upon it, and the force with which this fresh weight came down sent it into its place. Instantly he dropped upon his knees, slid the bar dextrously into the staple, and—the thing was done!

"Hurrah!" cried Archie, triumphantly.

"That makes ten!"

"They'll be safer," said the captain, "when we've heaped on some of these cotton-bales."

At that moment they heard a shrill cry up aloft, and saw the watch in the crow's nest gestulating to his shipmates on the after-deck.

"He has seen us," exclaimed De Benham.

"He's giving the alarm!"

"He's a lubber not to have done both long ago," said the captain, drawing his revolver. "Arm yourself with that hands-pike, Mr. Blyth. I shouldn't wonder if these fellows show fight."

The seaman in the crow's nest dropped like a bird, and snatched an iron stanchion from the bulwark. The watch on deck drew his cutlass. The helmsman, not daring to let go his wheel, raised a shout for help.

Captain Hay went up, revolver in hand.

"It's no good shouting, my men," he said.

"The ship is ours. The starboard watch, the prize-master, and the rest are all our prisoners. Will you lay down your weapons and surrender?"

Still standing on the defensive, the two seamen fell back a step, keeping close together, but answering never a word.

Then the captain stamped his foot upon the deck, and swore a tremendous oath.

"Quick!" he said. "We want no bloodshed; but if you resist, by the Lord! I'll shoot you down like vermin."

At that moment a swarthy face emerged from the engine-room hatchway—emerged unseen by the three Englishmen, whose backs were turned that way; but not unseen by the three Yankees. It was the face of the guard placed over the engineers below.

With one swift glance fore and aft he took in the whole bearings of the scene—hesitated for an instant, as if uncertain whether to attack the enemy in the rear or release his comrades in the fore-castle—then, with his revolver in one hand and his drawn cutlass in the other, he crept along by the gunwales, swiftly and stealthily, toward the fore-deck.

A flash of triumph shot from the eye of the helmsman. Archie, following the glance, caught sight of the retreating figure, and, with a loud cry, rushed in pursuit.

In one second they were all at the other end of the boat, three against three, wrestling together in a hand to hand struggle over the fore-castle hatch.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE PERILS AND DANGERS OF THE DEEP.

SHORT and sharp was the struggle over the fore-castle hatch; the Americans directing all their efforts to force it open—the Englishmen, to keep it fast. Archie flung himself desperately upon the bar, defending his position gallantly with the hands-pike. Then the Americans rushed in—each closed with his man—blows fell thick and fast—a shot was fired—the captain and the engine-room guard rolled together on the deck—De Benham, being gripped by the throat, dragged his assailant up against the bulwarks, and there jammed him back till he was fain to loose his hold and call for quarter—while Archie, though hard pressed, still kept the third Yankee off the bar.

Suddenly a new actor appeared upon the scene. Grimy, smoke-blackened, armed with a huge engine-room poker, one of the assistant firemen came rushing to their aid.

—Came just in time; for Archie had lost his footing, and was getting the worst of it. The Yankee's knee was on his chest—the Yankee's hand approached the fatal bar.

Down on that Yankee's head descended the terrible poker, and stretched him senseless on the deck! Then Archie flew to De Benham, who was pinning his man down by main force, and could not loose his hold. In another moment the Americans were all three disarmed, and the struggle was over.

Then Captain Hay summoned the helmsman to surrender, asking him whether he would be willing to help navigate the vessel into some neutral port. The man hesitated; but only for a moment.

"Wa'al," he said, "you'll dew it, I calc'late, whether I bristle my back, or whether I don't."

"I'd do it," replied the captain, "if I'd only one pair of hands to help me."

"Then I cave. Guess I may as well hev my libbaty."

To open the cuddy and relieve the pilot of his irons; to lock up the three prisoners in his place; to heap cotton-bales over the fore-castle hatch, was the work of the next few minutes.

Then, shaking himself like a water-dog just landed, Mr. Zachary Polter looked round with a grim smile, and said:

"I reckon I'd hev been more obliged to yew if yew had turned that thar key a bit sooner, and let me go shares in the fun. Don't you think, cap'n, we'd better put her head about and steer for Bermuda?"

Charts were at once brought out, and a hurried council was held. The boat was found to be about thirty miles due east of Cape Hatteras. To resume their interrupted course and make for Nassau, skirting the blockaded coast the whole way, was now out of the question. It was therefore anxiously debated whether they should steer for St. George's, Bermuda, or adopt the more daring course of running direct for the Azores.

Polter, who was perhaps unwilling to go very far afield, inclined for the Bermudas. The captain and De Benham voted for the Azores. Each alternative had much to recommend it. St. George's was a British port, and lay within some five hundred and fifty miles of the point at which they found themselves; whereas the nearest of the Azores was more than four times that distance. But then, to go to St. George's, they must in some measure run back upon their course in a southeasterly direction, just keeping in those waters where the American cruisers swarmed thickest; while by making for the Azores, they would be steering almost east-northeast, nearing home, and leaving the American coast and all its perils farther and farther behind at every turn of the screw.

Then there was the cotton! They could not take it to Nassau now; yet it must go to England, somehow. And then there was the refitting of the *Stormy Petrel*, which could be done better and cheaper at Liverpool than by Mr. Wilbur H. Sakem at Victoria Creek, Nassau.

The time for deliberation was short; but this plan of shaping their course for Europe seemed on all accounts so much the best that it resolved itself at last into a mere question of coals.

They were now in Lat. $35^{\circ} 15' N.$ and Long. $76^{\circ} 08' W.$, and hence, supposing no accidents, it would take them, with their one efficient engine, from twelve to fourteen days to reach the port of Horta in the island of Fayal, 2270 miles away. Had they fuel for so long?

The chief engineer was sent to examine the state of the coal-bunkers. He came back looking somewhat grave.

"Well, Mr. Davis," said the captain, "shall we hold out for fourteen days and nights?"

"We can hold out, Sir, for just nine days and nights, and about eight hours over," replied the engineer.

The captain bit his lip.

"All right, Davis," he said, after a moment's pause. "Go ahead. We'll put a hundred miles between ourselves and the coast first; and to-morrow we'll hoist fore and aft sails, and eke out

your coals that way." Then turning to De Benham, he added, grimly smiling, "If it comes to the worst, Mr. Supercargo, we must burn a few bales of your cotton."

And so the matter was decided.

The engineer then made his scrape, and the *Stormy Petrel* was put upon her course for the Azores.

De Benham beckoned Archie aside.

"I'm afraid we've half murdered the Mexican," he said. "Hay dealt him a blow on the head that might have killed an ox."

"Never mind the Mexican," said Archie. "Suppose we attend to this wound of yours first."

"Wound!—what wound?" And De Benham, who had no idea that he was hurt, looked down, and saw for the first time that his shirt was full of blood. To unbutton his waistcoat and tear the shirt open was the work of a moment.

"I saw the fellow's knife glitter," he said; "but I never felt it touch me. It's nothing of a cut, I fancy."

"Do you call it nothing?" said Archie. "Why, it's four inches long; but I don't think it's very deep. It seems to have glanced off the ribs and struck upward. Don't it hurt awfully?"

De Benham laughed.

"Not yet," he said. "I didn't even know I was scratched. But there!—'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a barn-door."

"The sooner it's seen to," said Archie, "the better."

And then he insisted on calling in the aid of the captain, who being, like most naval commanders, a bit of a surgeon, bound up and strapped the wound together; not perhaps very skillfully, but somehow.

This done, they hastened to De Benham's cabin to see after the master's mate.

They found him, however, recovered from the blow; his eyes rolling; his face and throat purple from the efforts he had made to burst his bonds; and the India rubber pad nearly bitten through. So they clapped him into the double-irons from which the pilot had just been released, and marched him off into solitary confinement in a little dark closet by the captain's cabin.

And now an anxious time began—a time of great toil and hardship, when there was much to be done, and but few to do it. Of their whole crew, the American (upon whose good faith it would have been unsafe to rely implicitly) was the only able seaman. De Benham and Archie were "green hands;" the firemen, if taken from their regular work, were not much better; and the chief engineer was bound to his engine. To make the most of such inadequate material called for the nicest management. Hours and duties had to be parceled out with the greatest exactness, allowing the minimum of rest to each, and taxing to the utmost the endurance of all.

It was arranged, therefore, that the captain and pilot should take the command by turns and the helm by turns; only intrusting the wheel now and then to the American, while one of them snatched a brief hour for sleep. This American, however (whose name was Rawle), was chiefly employed about the sails and rigging; while to De

Benham and Archie was assigned all the drudgery of the voyage, such as the cooking, cleaning up, and so forth. By night they took it in rotation to do two hours' stoking and stand a two-hours' watch; so relieving the assistant firemen, and getting each four hours for sleep. On these two devolved also the duty of attending to the prisoners. This might have proved a service of danger, but for De Benham, who solved the problem by cutting a hole in the fore-castle hatch, and lowering the men's food and water in a bucket. This hole, which was only just big enough for the purpose, they closed over between whiles with a cotton-bale. The others, being confined by twos and threes, were more easily managed; and as for the prize-master and mate, they had the honor of taking their meals under the charge of an armed guard, with the additional advantage of two aids to digestion in the shape of a pair of six-shooters held close against their heads all the time they were at table.

Toiling thus by day and night, haggard, unshaven, unkempt, black with coal dust, and smeared with grease and tar, the two green hands—one of whom was weak and feverish from loss of blood—had the hardest berth of all.

On the first day—that is, the day when they recaptured the *Stormy Petrel*—they sighted several vessels, mostly to windward, and cruising, apparently, close in shore. But these they evaded, almost without alteration of their course. Then came the cover of night; and still prodigal of their coal, they pressed on at the utmost speed of which, in the crippled state of her machinery, the vessel was still capable. By dawn, they had left Cape Hatteras one hundred miles astern.

The second day, about noon, the wind being in their favor, they hoisted fore and aft sails. All that day, and all the next, aided by wind and steam, they went on with unabated speed. By this time they were justified in deeming themselves tolerably safe against all danger of pursuit from United States' cruisers.

In the mean while De Benham bore up, doing his work unflinchingly, and refusing to admit, even to himself, how much he suffered from his wound. Yet there were times when his limbs failed under him, and his brain swam, and the sky and sea seemed to turn red, like blood. The wound, in fact, had not been properly dressed; and now, weak as he was, he would not spare himself in any way.

"I'm sure you're ill, old fellow," Archie would say from time to time. "You've lost an awful lot of blood, depend on it. Now just go and lie down, and let me take your work for an hour or two."

But De Benham always protested that he was well and strong, and able to take Archie's work as well as his own.

As the afternoon of the third day wore away the wind began shifting more toward the westward; irregular troops of thin coppery clouds were seen to scud fitfully across the horizon; and the sun went down in a wild mist of crimson and gold.

On the morning of the fourth day the wind veered round to the west-northwest, and the barometer began to fall.

By noon the sky was densely overcast; the wind was freshening and the sea was getting up. Then Captain Hay ordered the hatches to be bat-

tened down, the hole in the fore-castle hatch to be boarded over, the sails to be furled, and the cotton-bales (such of them, at least, as remained on deck, not having been flung overboard in the chase) to be made fast amidships.

Meanwhile the barometer fell to 29.00.

And now sudden gusts of rain swept up from time to time; the sea-birds darted, screaming, along the crests of the waves—the sky came down blacker and lower, like a pall—the breeze rose to a gale—the ship's course was altered in such wise as to keep the wind and sea upon her quarter—the gale rose to a hurricane; and by five bells in the afternoon watch (i. e., 2.30 P.M.) the full fury of the storm was upon them.

Then the sea became one sheet of boiling foam; and the wind raged and thundered, as if there were again war in heaven.

To the two "green hands" it seemed as if the sea and sky were coming together. Blinded by the salt spray, deafened by the roar of the elements, they held on, as it were, for the bare life, clinging to any thing that offered, and expecting to be carried off their feet with every fresh gust.

The barometer was now down to 28.33.

"Send Wilson on deck and Blyth below, and bid Davis slow down the engine," shouted the captain through his speaking-trumpet.

He was holding on by the binnacle at one side and De Benham at the other, with little more than an arm's-length between them: yet the supercargo heard the words but vaguely, as from a vast distance. Wilson was one of the assistant firemen.

De Benham tried to make his way over to where Archie was standing backed up under the lee of the galley, trying to keep up a look-out through the mist and darkness; but he might as well have attempted to walk through a stone-wall as face the direct force of that tremendous wind. It met him like a solid body, and almost felled him where he stood; so he tacked about like a ship, and, crawling on his hands and knees, crept round by the gunwales.

"Go below to the engine-room—send Wilson on deck—bid Davis slow down the engine," he shouted, repeating the captain's orders.

But though he gave out the words with all the power of his lungs, he could not make Archie hear them. It seemed to him that his voice was caught up and whirled away into infinite space as soon as it reached his lips.

At this moment a tremendous squall—swift, shrill, howling a wild war-whoop that seemed to cut the other thunders like a knife—hurled itself upon them from the northwest. The seas, checked in their running by this sudden shift of wind, struck the *Stormy Petrel* on her port quarter, and broke over her decks with a crash like the disruption of an Alp. The good boat heeled over—a shriek of terror burst from the lips of all on board—and Archie and De Benham found themselves rolling together in the lee scuppers, drenched and breathless, and half stunned.

They had expected nothing less than to be washed away into that terrible ocean. They got up clinging to each other, wondering to find themselves alive, dreading to see the decks cleared of all but their two selves. But there, thank Heaven! was Captain Hay, holding on by the fire-rail; there were Polter and the Yankee still safe at the helm. But there was a ruinous

gap in the port bulwarks where the waves had broken through, and the cotton-bales which they had taken such pains to make fast amidships were clean swept away.

Then, holding Archie tight round the neck with both arms, De Benham put his lips against his friend's ear, and once more shouted a repetition of the captain's orders.

Archie heard, and crawled away; but found the furnace sputtering and hissing like a reptile under torture, and the atmosphere one fog of steam and smoke. That overwhelming sea had poured like a cataract down the engine and fire room hatches, and even through the ventilators; and the water was up already to the grate-bars of the furnaces. Another such sea, it was plain, must put out the fires and stop the engine altogether.

All this time, the prisoners in the forecabin and cuddy were in mortal dread, thinking they should go to the bottom under hatches, and be drowned like kittens in a bucket. But in vain they hammered, and clamored, and dashed themselves against the battened-down hatchways. Had every throat been of brass, and every cry a salvo of artillery, no echo of the sound would have been audible to those on deck.

De Benham thought of the poor fellows, however, promising himself, should the vessel threaten to founder, that he would be the first to break open the hatches, and set them free to fight for their own lives as best they might. Till then, he could do nothing. Yes—one thing he could do, and did. He found a large hatchet, and hid it in a safe cranny close by, that it might be ready to his hand when the moment of extreme danger came.

And now, just as Archie had gone below and Wilson had come on deck, another frightful squall rushed up in the track of the first. This time, they heard the coming shriek, and so put the helm hard up, just in time to meet it.

Again the *Stormy Petrel* staggered and heeled over—again she shipped a sea. Each man there, seeing that huge, black, impending precipice, shut his eyes, and held on to whatever was nearest, expecting instant destruction. But the flood burst, buried them, and passed, carrying with it the roof of the galley, and snapping the foremast like a reed; yet mercifully sparing those five gasping units.

The ship had now broached to, and was rolling helplessly in the trough of the sea, when Davis, the engineer, came crawling upon deck, and reported the fires out, the engine stopped, and three feet and a half of water in the engine-room.

There was now but one chance between them and destruction; and that one chance was to get the ship by the wind by means of some scrap of after-sail. The captain shouted, "All hands aft!"—himself flew to the after-mast; climbed it like a cat; and with Polter's help lashed a stout rope about the head and body of the already close-reefed sail. This done, the lower half of the sheet was set "goose-winged" and hauled flat aft—so bringing the ship to the wind, and getting the sea upon her port bow. She now rose, with a long steady lift, to the waves: the steersman recovered command of the helm; and all hands were ordered to the pumps.

And now, cleaving the dreadful blackness like the sword of the destroying angel, came the first

flash of lightning: but the thunder scarcely made itself heard above the din of winds and waves. For some twenty minutes—it seemed like two hours at the least—it went on lightning incessantly. And then the wind shifted back again suddenly to the W.N.W.—torrents of rain came down, hammering the decks like small shot—the terrible pall overhead became less dense—the barometer began to rise—a faint, coppery light gleamed along the horizon; and, compared with what it was in the crisis of its fury, the storm might be said to have abated.

And now, little by little, the clouds parted, lifted, rolled off, ragged and still threatening, before the wind—rolled off, as it seemed, in endless succession, ever coming up upon the one horizon and vanishing upon the other. And still the unwearied wind lifted up its awful voice, and the sea raged, and the rain came down in floods.

Meanwhile the *Stormy Petrel* was in perilous case; her engines stopped, one screw disabled, her foremast gone, two-thirds of her slender crew at the pumps, and not a hand to spare to clear the engine-room and relight the fires.

Then Captain Hay bethought him of the two prisoners in the cuddy.

He went to them, and found them crouched close against the hatchway, in pitch-darkness, with the floor one pool of water.

"Look here, my men," he said, "we've had a devil of a gale, and are short of hands. Will you help work the boat as far as the Isle of Fayal, or stop here doing nothing for the next eight or ten days?"

"Wa'al, cap'n, I guess we'll come out," replied the cook, with considerable alacrity.

Four days of black hole, ending off with the pounding and pitching of the last two hours, had already been more than enough. They would have shipped with the Prince of Darkness rather than endure more of it.

"You must first give me your word of honor, both of you, that you'll attempt no rescue," said the captain. "For, look you, I'll scuttle this boat and sink every man of you, sooner than give her up a second time."

They promised eagerly, thankful for fresh air and liberty on any terms. So he gave them each a glass of grog (the first they had tasted for four days), sent them to the pumps, and dispatched Davis and Wilson to the engine-room.

Gradually, as evening drew on, the storm wore itself out. The wind, though still sweeping up in wild, mournful gusts, no longer battled with the seamen for their lives. The rain came and went, as the clouds passed and parted. Only the sea raged on, crested and terrible, and sullenly roaring.

By-and-by, under a lurid arch, the sun went down. Then for a moment every cloud was flushed with purple, every wave was tipped with fire. And then, suddenly, it was night.

By this time the pumps had done their work; the furnaces were glowing again; the *Stormy Petrel* was getting her steam up; and a jury-mast was being rigged in place of the foremast which they had lost in the gale.

Refusing to take a moment's rest, Captain Hay now sent Polter to turn in for a couple of hours; himself looked to the prisoners, set the night-watch, and went round the ship, inspecting the

damage done, and seeing that all was made snug for the night.

"You can patrol the fore-deck, and keep guard over the prisoners, Mr. Debenham," said he, when all this was done. "That is, if you are equal to two hours more before you turn in."

"I am equal," said De Benham, "to any duty you may assign me."

Saying which he went to his cabin, armed himself with revolver and cutlass, swallowed half a wine-glassful of raw brandy, and hastened to his post.

But he overrated his fast-failing strength. Till now, the excitement had kept him going; but he had been on duty sixteen hours, and had done a heavy day's work before ever the storm came upon them. Since then he had been helping with the furnaces, preparing the men's suppers—doing with his two arms, in short, the work of six. But now he was at the end of his powers. Scarcely had he taken a dozen turns when he became deadly faint. The deck swam before his eyes—slipped from under his feet. He fell without an effort to save himself, and so lay, till Archie stumbled over him, fetched assistance, and carried him to his cabin. There they laid him on his bed, bathed his hands and forehead, and brought him to. Presently he fell into a feverish sleep that lasted till daybreak.

He was no sooner awake, however, than he insisted on getting up and standing his morning watch. He declared that, having slept, he felt well and strong, and so would not be dissuaded. All that day he kept up, doing his share of the work as usual. The weather was still rough and squally, and bitterly cold; but he protested that he enjoyed the cold—that his wound gave him no pain—that he never felt better.

Meanwhile the *Stormy Petrel*, strained and knocked about, and driven out of her course by the hurricane, made less way than ever. Two of the Americans, moreover, were found hanging about the fore-castle hatchway; for which Captain Hay promptly consigned them to the cuddy, thus reducing his slender crew to its original numbers.

That night De Benham went to bed with his teeth clattering, his head and hands on fire, his feet like ice; and was dreaming, waking, talking, starting in his sleep, the whole night through. The next morning his pulse was at a hundred and twenty, and his temples were throbbing like to burst. Still the indomitable will prevailed. He rose, prepared breakfast for the crew and the prisoners, and helped to get up a keg of meal, a bushel of split pease, and other provisions from the store-room. At about an hour later he called Archie to his side, and said:

"Archie, old fellow, I give in. I can't keep on my legs any longer. I suppose this confounded cut has been too much for me."

"You ought to have given in long ago," said Archie.

"Perhaps—but never mind. Now look here—my head's all confused—I want you to remember that my books and papers are in the locker beside my bed. If I am too ill to take care of them myself, I place them under your charge."

"If you'll only be quiet and take rest till we get to Horta," said Archie, anxiously, "you'll be all right again."

"I don't know. At all events, Captain Hay

is responsible for the ship and cargo as far as Liverpool. At Liverpool you, as supercargo's clerk, must not leave the boat till you have Mr. Hardwicke's instructions about the cargo. Now just help me into bed, and report me on the sick-list to the captain."

With a heavy heart Archie did as he was bidden; and ere nightfall De Benham was in a high fever, and raving of the old student days at Zol-lenstrasse-am-Main.



CHAPTER XLVIII.

"HOME, SWEET HOME."

A LARGE steamer—one of the Royal West India mails plying between Liverpool and Colon—steamed up the Mersey one drizzly, foggy, unprepossessing afternoon in the month of December, 1861, and before going into dock, stopped at one of the landing stages to discharge her passengers. No sooner was the gangway laid down than there set in from the shore an influx of expectant friends, hastening to welcome their travelers home again; and from the ship, an efflux of those travelers who, having none to welcome them, desired only to land and get off to their several destinations as quickly as possible.

Among some of the first to leave the vessel were two young men; the one fair, bronzed, joyous-looking, and dressed with a sort of semi-nautical smartness that bespoke the landman bred and born; the other dark, thin, pale, his step feeble, his hands white and wasted, evidently an invalid, and hardly strong enough to support himself without the arm of his friend. They had very little luggage, and they drove at once to the London and North-Western Railway Station. Here they learned that a first and second class train would leave for London in half an hour's time.

"And the next after that?" asked the invalid.

"The limited mail, Sir, at eleven," replied the porter; "getting into London at four thirty-seven in the morning."

"The first is too soon, and the second is too

late," objected the other traveler. "You ought not to go on without proper food and rest; and a night journey is out of the question."

"I can go on quite well in half an hour," replied the invalid. "At what time does the next train reach Euston Square?"

"Half past ten, Sir—punctual."

"See that! Half past ten—I shall be home by eleven."

"Far better go to the Waterloo for to-night, and take an early train in the morning," urged his friend.

"No—no—no. I will go home at once. I shall save twenty-four hours by it."

"Say fifteen, at the outside."

"No, twenty-four. Ten to one but Mr. Hardwicke would be gone before I could get down to the City, if I waited till to-morrow; and now I shall be at Prior's Walk as early in the morning as himself. And then, you know, I've not seen my mother for seven months!"

"Willful man must have his way." Come to the refreshment-room, at all events, and get something to eat; I'm famished."

So De Benham and Archie—for, of course, it was De Benham and Archie—went to the refreshment-room, and had some soup and a chicken before starting. By five o'clock it was quite dark, and they were speeding toward London by the dim light of the carriage lamp. Then De Benham lay down at full length on the seat (for they had secured a compartment to themselves), and Archie covered him with coats and railway rugs, and he fell asleep.

It was now seven weeks since they recaptured the *Stormy Petrel*, and De Benham had been dangerously ill. They took him into the port of Horta, as they then thought, only to die. But the crisis of his fever passed over, and he lived. Here he was removed to a quiet lodging on the outskirts of the town, and attended not only by the local physician, but by the surgeon of a large English steamship then lying in the harbor. Aided by a Sister of Mercy from the neighboring convent, Archie nursed his friend faithfully day after day, night after night, scarcely leaving his bedside for an hour till the doctors pronounced him out of danger.

Meanwhile the captain of the *Stormy Petrel* had enough to do to bring the steamer into port, and could ill afford to have one of his scanty crew down with fever, and needing constant attendance. He did bring her in, however, in the course of the twelfth day after the storm; and a sorry spectacle she presented—one screw disabled, one mast gone, her galley roofless, her bulwarks carried away in two places, her crew haggard, exhausted, with beards of sixteen days' growth, and features so begrimed that their own nearest friends would scarcely have known them.

Once fairly anchored in neutral waters, Captain Hay's first act was to give the prize-crew their liberty. They went ashore for the most part quietly enough; but Lieutenant Kissick refused to shake hands at parting, and the Mexican, whose repertoire of invective was apparently inexhaustible, left the ship calling down strings of the most frightful imprecations upon the head of every man on board. Having put them ashore, Captain Hay left them to shift for themselves as they best could, till some United States vessel should touch at Horta, and pick them up.

The *Stormy Petrel* then lay in port for the space of a week and a day, during which time all was done that could be done in a temporary way to repair damages and fit her for the rest of her homeward voyage. A new foremast was rigged up, the bulwarks were replaced, the galley roofed in, and a skilled diver employed to clear the starboard screw from its entanglement of rope and bagging. Here, also, Captain Hay engaged as many fresh hands as might bring his crew up to its proper complement; and here Mr. Zachary Polter went ashore, waiting to go back to Nassau by the next West India steam-packet.

Then, having taken in coal, water, and fresh provisions, Captain Hay assumed the responsibility of delivering the cargo; left Archie to take care of De Benham; and, satisfied that the supercargo was by that time out of danger, weighed anchor, and put the good boat on her course for England.

Thus it happened that when Archie and De Benham arrived in Liverpool this dreary December afternoon, the *Stormy Petrel* had preceded them by nearly three weeks, and was at that moment lying over on her beam ends, undergoing a thorough refitting in one of the Birkenhead dock-yards.

About half-way to London De Benham woke and sat up.

"And this is England again!" he said. "I can scarcely believe that only seven months ago I was hurrying down this very line to join the *Stormy Petrel*. It seems like two years."

"You have lived two years in seven months, old fellow," replied Archie. "That's why I feel something the same way myself."

"I have lived ten years since that time on the Wye," said De Benham. "And that was—how long ago?"

"About seventeen months."

De Benham sighed wearily.

"I suppose I am greatly changed since then, Archie?" he said, after a pause.

"Well, yes; I suppose you are—rather," replied his friend, somewhat reluctantly.

"For the worse, eh?"

"You're—you're become more a man of the world."

"That is to say, I have become worldly."

Archie hesitated.

"Every man, I suppose," he said, at length, "has a right to make money, if he can."

"Why, then, should it be more worldly in me to make money than it is in any other man of business—in Mr. Hardwicke, for instance?"

"I have not said that it is so," replied Archie.

"You imply it."

"No, I don't," said Archie. "I am not accusing you—you are accusing yourself. I have not even said you are worldly."

"Worldly!" echoed De Benham, impatiently. "Good heavens! if you only knew—It is not for my own sake. It is for my mother's sake—for the sake of the dead—for the sake of the past!"

"I wish you wouldn't excite yourself," said Archie. "You forget how weak you are."

But De Benham went on, getting more and more vehement with every word.

"For money, simply as money, I do not care one straw," he said. "Do you suppose I want to be rich that I may enjoy the common pleasures

dealth? That I may have horses to ride, servants to wait upon me, rich dishes to eat, rare wines to drink? Is that what you think? I tell you, then, you mistake me utterly. I desire none of these things. I could be content to trudge on foot, and eat bread, and drink water, all the days of my life."

Archie looked at his watch.

"Only one hour and forty minutes more," he said, turning the conversation. "Don't you think you'd better lie down again?"

"No, no. I do very well as I am."

"Mrs. Debenham has no idea that you will be home before to-morrow, has she?"

"Not the faintest. But do, for heaven's sake, Archie, remember to call us by our right name!"

"I beg your pardon," said Archie, good-humoredly. "Mrs. De Benham, I should have said. But you only told me of it yesterday, you know; and it's so difficult to change all at once."

"I hope not," replied De Benham; and in all he said there cropped up the latent irritability of an invalid. "I hope not. It is a vile corruption of a noble Norman name."

"Were the De Benhams ever noble?" asked Archie.

"Undoubtedly. The prefix alone is evidence of seigniorial rights."

"It's a fine thing, after all, to inherit a good old name," said Archie. "I can't think why you ever put up with the corruption."

"Because I didn't know that it was a corruption till—till the summer before last."

"Then why didn't you change back to it at once?"

De Benham shook his head.

"I was a penniless beggar then," he said. "I was not going to bring discredit on the name."

"It is no discredit to be poor."

"That depends on the sort of poverty. A man may be in the army, and have nothing but his pay and his sword, and yet be no whit inferior to the first nobleman in the land. But he can not claim to be a gentleman, or the equal of gentlemen, if he plays the organ at a little City church for twenty-five pounds a year, and gives music-lessons to the children of leather-dressers and meat-salesmen."

"I should have thought music was more gentlemanly than trade," said Archie.

"In the abstract, regarded as one of the fine arts—yes. But in the concrete, as the means of eking out a shabby livelihood—no."

"And your dream of becoming a great composer—a second Meyerbeer or Mendelssohn—is that over forever?"

"Forever? Ah, no—I hope not. It depends—if ever I am rich enough—if ever I leave off this life of work and win my way to a life of leisure—"

"Rich enough!" interrupted Archie. "Why, I should have thought you were 'rich enough' already."

But again De Benham shook his head.

"I am getting tired," he said. "I must lie down again. How these carriages shake!"

So he lay down; and Archie covered him again with rugs and wraps, and gave him some sherry from a flask.

"Perhaps you can sleep a bit more, old chap," he said.

To which De Benham replied that he would

try; and so closed his eyes, and spoke no more till they reached London.

Arrived at the Euston Square terminus, Archie saw after their luggage, called a cab, and went up with his friend to the door of his own home.

"You'll come in and see my mother," said De Benham, waiting to be let in.

"No, that I won't," replied Archie. "She shall have you all to herself to-night; and I'll be off at once, before the door opens."

In another minute the wanderer was in his mother's arms, welcomed, wept over, adored.

"But you have been very ill!" she said, when the first moment of meeting was over. "I see that you have been much more ill than you told me!"

"Darling Mutter, once the worst was over, where would have been the good of telling you?"

"The worst! Ah, what was the worst? Tell me all, my darling."

"Well—we didn't get back the ship, you know, without a struggle; and I got a slash just here, in my left side, from one of those confounded Yankees—"

"Wounded! oh, heavens!—and then?"

"And then I had a bout of brain-fever."

Lady De Benham uttered a cry, and took him in her arms again, and kissed his forehead, his eyes, his hair. Brain-fever! He—her boy—her own, one treasure had brain-fever, and she not there to watch and tend him! She could scarcely believe it. It seemed too terrible to be true.

"And for what," she said, bitterly—"for whom have you suffered? In what cause have you risked your precious, precious life? For neither honor nor fame. For trade. For a few wretched cotton-bales and a little ignoble gain. For the benefit of that man in the City, whose wages you condescend to accept. Oh, Temple! oh, my son!"

"Dearest mother," replied De Benham, laughingly, "be sure that for Mr. Hardwicke's benefit alone I would not take the journey from Canonbury to St. Paul's. I am not so benevolent. What I have done, I have done for my own sake—and yours."

"Not for mine!" she said, shuddering. "Oh no! Do not say that you were wounded and ill for my sake!"

"Well, shall I say for the sake of what you call my 'ignoble gains'?"

"You treat it lightly enough," said Lady De Benham; "but what should I have done if—I had lost you?"

"But you have not lost me, Mutterchen! You have not lost me, and—I HAVE MADE SIXTY THOUSAND POUNDS."

CHAPTER XLIX.

A PASSAGE OF ARMS.

DE BENHAM came back to find himself famous. The story of the recapture had made its way long since into all the papers, and he and Captain Hay were the heroes of the tale. A spirited wood-cut of the *Stormy Petrel*, sketched by an artist dispatched to Birkenhead for that special purpose, had already appeared in the *Illustrated London News*. Two wonderful fancy

portraits, in which both captain and supercargo were represented in the costume of bold buccaneers and the likeness of hair-dressers' dummies, graced the pages of a popular pictorial penny serial, and were to be seen in the windows of every petty news-vendor's shop and on every kitchen table in the metropolis. A grand, romantic, sensational, nautical drama in six *tableaux*, entitled the "Stars and Bars; or, the Blockade-runner of the Western Main," was announced for immediate representation at one of the transpontine theatres. Throughout the clubs, for one whole day, the story was in every man's mouth. Down at the docks, at Lloyd's, at Trinity House, in the Long Room at the Custom-house, and the like, it was still the prevailing topic of conversation. The provincial papers fell upon it *en masse*, dished it up in a dozen different ways, and fed their readers upon it for a week. In short, Captain Frank Hay, being a plain man with no relish for display and a horror of speech-making, was so disturbed by the warmth of his reception, by the dinners he had to eat, the questions he had to answer, and the bows he had to make, that he fled from his own notoriety at the end of the first week, and took refuge among his relations down in the wilds of Cornwall.

And now De Benham came, and of him the world was disposed to make even a greater hero than it had made of Captain Hay. He was young; he was gentlemanly; he was good-looking. Above all, he had been wounded; and he was still suffering from the consequences of his wound. What more could a sensation-loving public desire, except to persecute its hero with dinners and speeches, testimonials and addresses; to waylay him on staircases; pin him up in corners of drawing-rooms; pester him for biographical materials; for his autograph, his photograph, his monogram, and every thing that was his; and lionize him within an inch of his life? All this they would have done, if De Benham could have been brought to submit to it; but he was, in his way, as intractable as Captain Hay. To the compilers of penny-press biographies he turned a deaf ear. To the young ladies who wrote pretty imploring notes begging for his *carte de visita*, autograph, and so forth, he got Lady De Benham to indite civil refusals. To the public companies, naval associations, ship-owners', ship-brokers', and other societies which desired to entertain him, his present condition of health supplied a sufficient and satisfactory excuse. He was, in fact, too proud to accept all this miscellaneous hospitality, and too anxious for the preservation of his *incognito* not to try by every means in his power to divert public curiosity from himself, his antecedents, and his family history.

"I have no mind," he said, talking it over with his mother—"I have no mind to appear before these commercial bodies in the character of a meritorious young man who has done his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him, and therefore deserves encouragement. I don't choose to be shaken hands with, and praised, and patted on the back by them. They mean to be very complimentary, I have no doubt, and very condescending; but such civilities need to be accepted in a grateful spirit—and my spirit would not be grateful."

Proud as she was, Lady De Benham could not quite partake in her son's scorn of his own popularity. The incense that these people desired to burn before him, even though it was tainted with the things of trade, would have smelled sweet in her nostrils. Despite her better taste and her better judgment, she could not help feeling that it would have been pleasant to sit in the ladies' gallery, and see him fêted, and hear his health proposed, and listen to the speeches made in his honor. As for the deed that he had done, and the notoriety he had achieved thereby, these were circumstances that went far, in truth, toward reconciling her to the career he had chosen. Living in seclusion as she lived, reading no newspapers and hearing no gossip, she had begun by scarcely appreciating all the gallantry of the first, and by knowing nothing of the extent of the second. But now, finding that the world at large (and especially that narrow, grasping, selfish, commercial world, which she had hitherto held in such contempt) was disposed to regard her idol as a hero, Lady De Benham's views underwent some modification. She ventured so far now as to admit that even in the course of trade, brave and honorable things might be achieved; and (which was still more wonderful) be not only achieved, but appreciated. She would have been far happier, of course, if the whole thing had happened in the Royal Navy instead of in the merchant service; if, for instance, her boy had recaptured an English ship in time of war. That would have been glory unalloyed; but even "glory obscured" was, for his sake, worth the having.

Stand aloof as they might, however, there was one entertainment organized in their joint honor, from accepting which neither Temple De Benham nor Captain Frank Hay found it possible to excuse themselves; and this was a dinner of ceremony at Strathellan House.

Now De Benham, it may be remembered, had once before been invited to dine at Mr. Hardwicke's table, and had declined the honor. That was in the earlier days of their connection, when the young man returned from his journey to St. Petersburg; and Mr. Hardwicke then proposed that the party should consist of Archibald Blyth, Mr. Timothy Knott, and "one or two City men."

But the aspect of affairs had greatly changed since that time. Nothing was now to be spared that might do honor to the hero of the occasion—for though the captain of the *Stormy Petrel* came in for his equal share in these demonstrations, still Temple De Benham was in the eyes of most people, and above all in the eyes of Mr. Hardwicke, the hero *par excellence* of the events they met to celebrate. So there was now to be a dinner of ceremony, followed by an immense reception in the evening; and the grand service of silver-gilt plate was to be used for the first; a supper was to be furnished by Gunter for the second; the hall, staircases, and supper-room were to be lined with the choicest exotics; and the greatest of living violinists was to be engaged for the entertainment of the guests.

"He takes you down, of course, Claudia," said Mr. Hardwicke across the breakfast-table. It was the morning of the day of the dinner-party, and they were discussing the final arrangements.

"The man of lowest rank present!" said Miss Hardwicke. "It seems preposterous."

"Not when the whole affair is held in his honor. Read an account of any dinner given to any public character—say, for instance, to a *Times* correspondent—and you will find that he takes precedence of all the nobility in the room."

"Well, granting that point—the place of honor belongs, I should imagine, in this case, to the captain. This young man is only the supercargo."

"This young man originated the whole enterprise, to begin with, and has put upward of four hundred thousand pounds in my pocket," replied the merchant, warmly. "And this young man not only conceived the daring scheme by means of which the ship was saved from confiscation, but fought, and was wounded, in the act of carrying that scheme into execution. If ever one man deserved precedence more than another, young Debenham deserves it to-night."

"As you please," said Miss Hardwicke, indifferently. "I shall be very glad when it is all over."

And so that knotty point was settled.

The dinner-hour was fixed for half past eight; and by a quarter past the carriages began setting down. At three minutes to the half hour De Benham drove up in a Hansom.

The visitors were all assembled, and the general expectation had risen to its height, when, last to arrive, and exactly punctual, the hero of the evening was announced.

Mr. Hardwicke went to the drawing-room door to meet him. Captain Frank Hay had been there more than a quarter of an hour already; and, embarrassed by the introductions he had to go through as each person arrived, stood turning over the engravings in a port-folio, and scarcely opening his lips. Every one was disappointed in him; and every one, not unnaturally, concluded that the supercargo would prove equally *gauche*. When, however, De Benham made his appearance on the threshold, an audible murmur ran round the room.

"Mr. Debenham—my sister," said the merchant, going through the ceremony of introduction.

De Benham bowed profoundly; Miss Hardwicke extended the tips of her fingers.

"I think we have met before," she said, with some attempt at graciousness.

De Benham bowed again.

"I do not forget that I have had that honor," he replied, smiling; but the smile had in it something equivocal, and there was a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

Then Mr. Hardwicke presented him to the rest of the guests, among whom were Lord Stockbridge; a dapper little colonial Bishop, with very neat legs; an Honorable of tender years from the Waste-Paper Office, whose life was consumed in the effort to screw a glass into his right eye; a dilapidated dowager in diamonds, whose complexion was a miracle of art; one Sir Philip Mostyn and his wife, from some British consulate abroad; a certain Colonel Calderon, who wore the Star of India; two or three Members of Parliament, with their wives; a sergeant learned in the law; a popular author with a huge beard, who was openly sulky because he was not the lion of the evening; a Commissioner of something unpleasant—lunacy, or bankruptcy, or sewers; and one or two others, clergymen, barristers, and the like. A large party

—twenty-two in all—and the "aldermanic element," as Miss Hardwicke called it, carefully excluded.

Then dinner was announced, and the company went down. The table was gorgeous with *plateau*, and vases, and *candélabre* of costliest design; the plates were silver gilt; the side-board was a sight to see.

"Gentlemanly-looking young fellow, egad!" said Lord Stockbridge to his next neighbor, as the soup went round.

Next neighbor—banker; M.P.; railway director; fabulously rich—looked up, nodded, and replied:

"Ah! supercargo? Yes, very much so, indeed."

"Was positively an organist, you know—almost starving only two years ago, at some place in the City. And Hardwicke took him in hand; picked him out of the gutter, by George!—literally out of the gutter."

"Good gracious!" said the banker.

"Ay, such is life! He has made his own fortune since then, and, they say, has pretty nearly doubled the fortune of our good friend at the foot of the table."

"Ah! never believe in those rapid fortunes myself," said the banker.

"I believe in this one," replied Lord Stockbridge, "because all the facts go to prove it. You've read about that affair of the *Stormy Petrel*, of course?"

"*Stormy Petrel*? Oh, ah!—yes, to be sure. Very extraordinary. Good sherry, this."

"Capital; but Hardwicke's wines are always good. By-the-way, that's a famous tap of Amon-tillado at the club."

And then they talked of the cellar at the Erechtheum, and of a certain wonderful filly in Prince Tchernikoff's stables, and of a race that was run the week before at Sartory; and no more was said of De Benham or his adventures.

Others, however, were discussing him freely round the table. The Dowager on Mr. Hardwicke's right, and Lady Mostyn on his left, plied their host with questions; and the lady who had been assigned to Captain Frank Hay—a pretty, bright-eyed, blood-thirsty little woman in a cloud of *tulle* and *tarlatan*—gave that worthy seaman no peace.

"But is it really true, Sir," she said, "that he killed three Americans with his own hand?"

"It's the biggest lie, ma'am, that was ever invented," replied the captain, blantly.

"Oh dear! you don't say so?" she exclaimed.

"Then didn't he kill any body?"

"No, ma'am."

"And didn't you kill any body?"

"Certainly not, ma'am—God be thanked."

"Really, now? Well, I am so disappointed! But he was wounded, Sir, was he not? The newspapers all say he was wounded."

"Yes, ma'am. He got a stab in the side, which laid him on his beam ends for a fortnight, raving with delirium."

"Raving with delirium!" echoed the lady in *tulle*, with infinite relish. "Dear me, how very dreadful!"

And then she indulged in a long stare at De Benham through her eye-glass.

Meanwhile, the Bishop, and those immediately about the upper end of the table, were making

him talk, sorely against his inclination, about the recapture of the *Stormy Petrel*.

"I have nothing to add," he said, "to the newspaper narratives. I know less about it, indeed, than any man on board; for I was ill and in bed the last few days of the voyage."

"Your position would not have been particularly pleasant, if the attempt had failed," said the Commissioner. "The American courts would have tried to bring it in piracy on the high seas."

"I am not at all sure, even now, that it was not piracy," replied De Benham.

"I don't think you need be uneasy on that head," observed a gentleman a little farther down the table. "The blockade itself is only legal so far as it can be enforced; and, *ceteris paribus*, the recapture of your vessel would only have been piracy if it had failed. It is just one of those cases where might makes right."

"The question, at all events," said De Benham, "is one that I have no desire to consider too curiously."

"What became of the Yankees whom you out-manceuvred?" asked the author with the beard. "According to the *Shooting Star*, you made them walk the plank; but I presume that's a slight exaggeration."

"We left them to amuse themselves at Fayal till the next United States vessel should happen to put in. I trust they are safe home by this time."

"Are you of opinion, Mr. Debenham," asked the Bishop, "that the war is likely to be renewed in the spring?"

"It will be renewed, my lord, and maintained," replied De Benham, "while there is an ounce of lead in the South, or a dollar in the North."

"Confounded bad look-out that for one's American securities," said the banker.

Lord Stockbridge laughed.

"Egad!" said he, "there's the advantage of being a poor devil like myself. The money-market may turn itself inside out, like a zoophyte, without causing me a moment's uneasiness."

Miss Hardwicke, sitting at the head of the table and speaking only a word now and then, heard most of the conversations that were going on. At these words of Lord Stockbridge's, a faint something which was scarcely a smile flitted across her lips. Presently, the wine having traveled once round the table, she looked across at the Dowager. Then followed a general stir; a gathering up of gloves and fans; a simultaneous rising of all the company. Mr. Hardwicke held open the door—the ladies rustled out in order of precedence—the gentlemen were left alone.

Mr. Hardwicke then took his plate and glass, and moved to the head of the table; one or two of the others changed places; and all closed up nearer the host.

Half a dozen separate conversations were at once set going, and the wine began to circulate more freely. The parliamentary men talked politics; the Sergeant and Commissioner discussed an interesting case that happened to be "on" just then in one of the law courts; Lord Stockbridge and the banker, still deep in sporting matters, brought out their memorandum-books and compared entries; the Honorable from the Waste-Paper Office and a young barrister named Jopling

talked across the table of the decline of the ballet; the author listened to all, and drank his claret in gloomy silence; and the Bishop, who was intelligently interested in the question, continued upon the subject of the American war.

The prevailing opinion in England at this time (especially among the upper classes, whose sympathies, for the most part, inclined toward the cause of the South) was that, however bloody and protracted the struggle might be, the Confederates must eventually succeed in establishing their independence. It was an opinion that De Benham had found himself so often driven to dissent from, that he had endeavored of late to avoid the topic. To-night, however, such avoidance was not possible; for it proved to be, above all others, the one subject upon which those around him desired to hear him speak.

"I am credibly informed," said Colonel Calderon, "that less than one-third of the men in the Federal regiments are genuine Northerners; and that their ranks, being recruited from the back slums of Boston and New York, are chiefly made up of English, Irish, and German emigrants. If this be so, must not the chances of victory necessarily lie with those men who fight on their own soil for their own liberties, and the liberties of their wives and children?"

De Benham shook his head.

"The strength of the North lies in that very fact, that they can recruit their ranks unlimitedly," he said. "The population of the South, on the other hand, consists of only masters and slaves. There exists no middle class whatsoever. Hence it follows that in a Confederate regiment every soldier is a gentleman. I have myself seen a Charleston regiment, one thousand strong, recruited entirely from among the landed gentry and the learned professions. Granted that the enemy has money, perseverance, and an immense lower class to fall back upon, the ultimate fate of a country so defended is inevitable. Let them fight as bravely as they will, these gentlemen-soldiers must be outnumbered at last. They fall, and fall, and by-and-by there are none to succeed them."

"So that, in fact, it is resolved into a mere question of time," observed the Bishop.

Here Lord Stockbridge put up his memorandum-book, and joined in the conversation.

"According to my creed," he said, "one gentleman is equal to a score of mercenaries."

"But not to five hundred. Besides, you can not call the Federal soldiers mercenaries. They are naturalized emigrants."

Some question then arose as to the original peopling of the States, and De Benham pointed out how, in Mobile and Charleston, he had come upon families perpetuating to this day (in some instances, without even a variation in the spelling) the old Royalist and Huguenot names of the first settlers—Lowndes, Rutledge, Hampton, Laurens, Prioleau, and the like.

"I observe, by-the-way," said Mr. Hardwicke, "that you have spelled your own name differently of late, Mr. Debenham."

"I divide it," said De Benham; "but I do not alter a letter."

"It is an alteration that gives the name a Norman air," said Mr. Hardwicke.

"The name is Norman," replied De Benham. "I have only restored it."

Lord Stockbridge looked up, with his hand on the claret-jug.

"Are you going to change your name, Mr. Debenham?" he asked. "So many people change their names now—there seems to be quite a fashion in it."

De Benham hesitated. He was annoyed by the turn the conversation had taken, and would gladly have diverted it into some other channel. Meanwhile Mr. Hardwicke replied for him.

"Mr. Debenham was just explaining to me that he has not altered, but only restored his name," he said. "He now writes it—De Benham."

Lord Stockbridge repeated the name.

"De Benham!" he said. "There was but one family of De Benhams, and they are extinct."

It was not a civil speech, and it was not spoken civilly. De Benham looked down, displeased and silent. Mr. Hardwicke smiled uncomfortably.

"Apparently not, my lord," he said, "since we here find the name surviving."

"But it is impossible that it should survive," said Lord Stockbridge, persistently. "I knew the last Lord De Benham—knew him well; and he was the last of his name and race. Look in Banks's 'Extinct and Dormant Peerage,' and there you'll find it."

There was silence now round the table. Every one was listening. De Benham still said nothing.

Mr. Hardwicke murmured something about the possibility of a "mistake," and proposed that they should change the subject.

Lord Stockbridge laughed—a short, disagreeable laugh—and shrugged his shoulders.

"Egad! there is some mistake," he said; "but not on my part. I knew De Benham of Benhampton as well as I know you, Hardwicke; and better. And a precious scamp he was—ran through every thing before he was of age, and died like a dog, somewhere abroad."

De Benham rose in his place, pale to the very lips.

"I must request Lord Stockbridge to retract those statements," he said, in a voice that vibrated with suppressed anger. "He is speaking of my father."

The insolent smile vanished from Lord Stockbridge's face, and he set down his glass untasted. De Benham, looking at him fixedly, went on:

"My father was a man of honor. He paid his debts with his last acres. He died at a little inn near Capel Carig in North Wales; and he was buried in the vaults of Benhampton Church, among his own people."

Lord Stockbridge became purple with embarrassment.

"Is this possible?" he stammered.

"I have simply stated facts," said De Benham.

"Gad, now, I never was so taken by surprise in my life—never, by Jove! De Benham married—name and title surviving—I can hardly believe it!"

He paused, and while he paused there was dead silence. De Benham, still looking him in the face, remained standing.

Then Lord Stockbridge, knowing that something more was expected from him, resumed his self-possession, left his seat, and went round to the other side of the table.

"Young gentleman," he said, "if you are the son of De Benham of Benhampton, I beg your pardon. I did not mean to imply that your father spent his fortune dishonorably;—if I seemed to say so, I am sorry for it. I was a spendthrift myself in those days, and I'm afraid time hasn't improved me. But your father was a good fellow—an open-hearted, open-handed fellow—and I'm glad to make the acquaintance of his son. Lord De Benham, I hope you will do me the honor to shake hands with me?"

So De Benham bowed, and shook hands with him, and they resumed their seats.

Great is the art of making an apology gracefully. This little speech was spoken so easily, so frankly, that Lord Stockbridge made capital of the transaction in the laying up of golden opinions.

"Stockbridge?" said the Commissioner, hearing him doubtfully spoken of a day or two after. "Oh dear! no. A most gentlemanly, candid person; undoubtedly a man of honor. Don't believe a word of it!"

And of those who were sitting round Mr. Hardwicke's table that evening at Strathellan House, there was not one, thenceforth, who would not have been ready at any moment to indorse that Commissioner's opinion.

CHAPTER L.

IN THE LIBRARY.

WHEN the gentlemen went up stairs, the rooms were already filling fast. Mr. Hardwicke went to his sister and told her of the revelation that had been made in the dining-room.

"A lord!" said Miss Hardwicke, incredulously.

"Yes, a lord—positively a lord! His title, Sir Philip tells me, is one of the oldest in the peerage; and he holds some great hereditary foreign rank as well; I don't exactly know what. And to think that he has been acting all this time as my supercargo and foreign agent—it sounds like a chapter out of a novel!"

"Why has he concealed it so long?" asked Miss Hardwicke.

"Because he was poor. The last lord ran through every thing, and this young man has had to work for his bread."

"Well, he is not poor now," said Miss Hardwicke. "Did you not tell me that he had made sixty thousand pounds?"

"Yes; but that's no great capital for a man of his rank. Fancy his having been our organist at St. Hildegard's!"

Miss Hardwicke looked across the room at De Benham with some appearance of interest.

"It's a strange story," she said. "It will be all over London to-morrow."

"No doubt; but he would not have told it if circumstances had not forced him to speak. If he means to stick to business it will be very awkward for him. It is awkward for me. He is in my employment at this moment. Our relations are most anomalous—most anomalous. There's Choake—I wonder if he has heard any thing about it!"

And away hurried Mr. Hardwicke to retail the news to the rector of St. Hildegard's, who retailed it presently to a dozen others, who went on

retailing it all the evening. Before midnight there were three hundred people assembled; and not one of those three hundred had been five minutes in the rooms without hearing and marveling over this romance of a penniless peer, who began life as a musician, went into trade, and made a fortune in six months by blockade-running in time of war. As for Captain Frank Hay, they seemed to forget that he had borne any share in De Benham's later adventures. He was hopelessly eclipsed; and luckily preferred to be so.

Meanwhile Miss Hardwicke felt that it was imperative upon her to make some allusion to these events, when, in the course of the evening, De Benham chanced to be near her.

"Lord De Benham," she said, "I am anxious to express my brother's regret and my own that you should have been compelled, in our house, to speak upon topics which you would have preferred to avoid."

De Benham bowed.

"It is a matter of very slight importance," he said. "I have only published to-day facts which it was my intention to publish hereafter."

"Still, you may have intended that hereafter to be long distant."

"I had intended it to be as soon as I was in a position to—carry out certain projects," replied De Benham; "and I had hoped that it might be during my mother's lifetime. On the whole, there is nothing to regret."

"I understand from our cousin Archibald that you reside with your mother," said Miss Hardwicke. "Do you think Lady De Benham would allow me to have the honor of sending her some of our hot-house flowers?"

De Benham bowed again, somewhat coldly.

"You are much too kind," he said.

At that moment the great violinist began to play, and the conversation broke off abruptly.

Among the evening guests, in the mean time, came Archibald Blyth. The first persons he encountered on entering the room were Mr. and Miss Alleyne, and the American journalist, Washington Flack. Mr. Hardwicke, always glad to leaven the mass of his guests with a certain proportion of artists and literary men, had sought this opportunity of making the personal acquaintance of the painter of the "Athens of Pericles;" and Mr. Alleyne, equally glad to cultivate his new patron, had accepted the invitation for his daughter and himself. When Archie came upon them they were standing just within the entrance to the first drawing-room, and had apparently but that moment arrived. While Archie was in the act of shaking hands with them the Transatlantic Exterminator, who was just going away, seized him by the button-hole.

"You close Coon!" said the man of letters.

"You mute Opossum! you undecipherable old Hieroglyphic! why didn't you behave to me like a friend, and tell me all about it?"

"All about what?" said Archie, not altogether relishing the great man's playfulness.

"About this celebrated unknown of yours—this peerless peer—this counting-house aristocrat of limited means and unlimited pedigree! Why, I'd have given any thing to put the *Exterminator* a week ahead of the other papers!"

"I declare I haven't the faintest idea of what you are talking about," said Archie.

"I am talking of your Lord De Benham."

I

Archie looked from Mr. Washington Flack to Miss Alleyne, and from Miss Alleyne back again to Mr. Washington Flack.

"Lord De Benham!" he repeated, in blank astonishment.

"You don't mean to say that you weren't in the secret? That I, Washington F., from across the broad and briny Atlantic, am the first to tell it to you? Now, by the Nine Gods! This is delicious."

And so, in a few serio-comic sentences, the American told as much as he knew of De Benham's story, ending off with:

"There, you downtrodden Helot of a bloated aristocracy! there's the history of the coroneted viper you've been warming in your unconscious bosom! Good-night."

Whereupon, with a wave of the hand, Mr. Washington Flack went his way, to tell the same story, with all kinds of variations, at three more evening parties and a club-supper in Covent Garden before going home to bed.

"Can this be true?" said Mr. Alleyne.

"I don't know—it may be," stammered Archie.

And again he looked at Miss Alleyne; but she turned her face away, and was silent.

At that moment came up two gentlemen, friends of her father; friends also of Mr. Hardwicke; who, knowing the house and its ways, carried Mr. Alleyne off to see certain Stanfields and Danbys in the down-stairs rooms; and then, for some minutes, Miss Alleyne and Archie were left alone.

"Mr. Blyth," she said, tremulously, "is he here?"

"Temple?—certainly. He has been dining here—he and Captain Hay; and no end of swells invited to meet them. You didn't know that?"

"I—I did not know it," she faltered.

Archie saw her color come and go, and his heart filled with compassion.

"He is certain to be in the farthest room," he said, dropping his voice; "and he is not likely to get out of it before supper. You needn't see him at all unless you choose; and he's sure not to see you if you don't go beyond the middle room. I beg your pardon. Perhaps I have no business to say this."

Miss Alleyne looked at him gratefully, and forced a smile.

"Thank you," she said; "I will stay here."

Then, after a few moments, she added:

"I should like to see Miss Hardwicke."

"My cousin Claudia? Oh, certainly. I will introduce you."

"I don't wish to be introduced. I only want to see her—to look at her. I hear she is very beautiful."

"She is very beautiful," replied Archie; "there is no mistake about that."

And then he hesitated. Miss Alleyne divined the cause of his hesitation.

"We might go just near enough to see through," she suggested.

So they made their way across the middle room, and as far as the entrance to the third drawing-room, where they stood back behind a crowd of people. And there, not far from the piano, they saw De Benham and Miss Hardwicke. It chanced to be during the moment of their brief conversation. Miss Hardwicke was



"HUSH!" SHE SAID, "I WILL NOT HEAR A WORD AGAINST HIM!"

just expressing her regret, and De Benham was assuring her that such regret was unnecessary.

"There she is," said Archie; "the lady in violet velvet."

The color rushed in a crimson tide to Miss Alleyne's face, and then ebbed suddenly, leaving her paler than before.

Presently Miss Hardwicke made her offer of the flowers, and made it with a smile. They saw the smile, and they saw the bow with which De Benham replied.

"By Jove!" said Archie. "She's not often so gracious as that."

Then the violinist began to play, and De Benham moved aside to give place to some ladies. Miss Alleyne shrunk back, trembling.

"Let us go, Mr. Blyth," she said. "He is looking this way—pray let us go!"

Archie gave her his arm to the outer room, and placed her in a chair near the door.

"Ought you not to go home?" he asked, seeing her pale and shivering.

"Not yet. We have only just come."

"But you are ill!"

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "Not ill, only tired—besides, papa has not yet seen Mr. Hardwicke—"

And then her voice broke, and Archie could see that her eyes filled with sudden tears. He clenched his teeth, and ground his heel into Mr. Hardwicke's velvet-pile carpet.

"By Heaven!" he growled, "it is too bad. It makes one hate him."

"Mr. Blyth, I will not let you say that of your friend."

"Why should I not say it, when it is true? It is the most heartless—"

Miss Alleyne laid her hand on Archie's sleeve. "Hush!" she said. "I will not hear a word against him. I understand it all now. Many things are clear to me to-night which were not clear before. He has other ends, other duties—it is far better as it is."

"But a mere selfish—"

"Dear Mr. Blyth, if I do not blame him, why should you? Believe me, I would not have it otherwise if I could. And now, if you please, we will not speak of this subject again."

Archie drew back, silenced; but as soon as the artist rejoined them, repeated his suggestion that Miss Alleyne should go home.

"But, my dear child," said her father, impatiently, "you look quite well. You were quite well when we started."

"And I shall be quite well now, papa, if I keep away from those hot rooms beyond," replied Miss Alleyne. "It is Mr. Blyth who insists that I am ill."

"Then, my love, let Mr. Blyth take you down to one of the lower rooms—to the library, for instance, where it is delightfully cool and quiet. You will be quite alone there; and can take a book till I am ready to fetch you away."

To this proposal Miss Alleyne replied that she should like it above all things; so Archie, who was sufficiently at home in his cousin's house, took her down to the library, wheeled an easy-chair to the fire, and fetched her a cup of hot coffee from the tea-room.

"And now, Miss Alleyne," said he, "I suppose I must not stop here—so I will go home."

"But you have not even been through the rooms," she said, in some surprise.

"I've had enough of it; and—and, to tell you the truth, I don't care to meet De Benham to-night. They say he's a lord, you know; and I'm not used to lords. Perhaps I shouldn't know how to be quite civil enough. Good-night, Miss Alleyne."

"Good-night, Mr. Blyth; but—there is one thing you must promise me."

"What is that?"

"That you will not quarrel with your friend."

Archie laughed, and shook his head.

"Oh no!" he said; "I will not quarrel with him."

"Nor be unkind to him—nor avoid him."

Archie paused.

"I am sure I can promise not to be unkind," he said; "but I think it likely that De Benham and I will see less of each other for the future. It is impossible that it should be otherwise. Now that his secret is known, he must assume his place in society; and the difference in rank will separate us, if nothing else does. I own I am feeling angry with him at this moment; but that has nothing to do with it. He is as much lost to me now, Miss Alleyne, as he is lost to you."

"I hope not," said Miss Alleyne. "With all my heart, I hope not."

Then Archie once more wished her good-night, and they shook hands.

"May I call to-morrow," he said, "to ask if you are better?"

"By all means, if you are in our neighborhood, and have nothing better to do. But I am quite well now."

Whereupon Archie protested that he should call all the same, and so took his leave.

It had been a foggy day and evening, and when he got out into the hall he found that the fog had turned to rain. The avenue, however, was full of carriages, and the guests were still arriving; so that he had to go some way along the inner-circle road before finding an empty Hansom. Having found it, he paused for a moment with his foot on the step, and looked back toward the lighted windows of Strathellan House.

"By Jove!" said he to himself, as he jumped

in and pulled down the glasses, "what man in his senses would throw over such a sweet little girl as that? And she called me 'dear Mr. Blyth!' 'Dear Mr. Blyth!'—suppose it had been 'dear Archie!'"

CHAPTER LI

A BUSINESS INTERVIEW.

IF Temple De Benham's brain had been less busy and his mood less restless during this first fortnight of his return to England, it is possible that he would sooner have recovered his looks and his strength. But he would not, or could not, dismiss from his mind those projects and anxieties which had now become as the life of his life—which impaired his sleep by night, dogged him like his shadow by day, and constantly impelled him to overtask his physical powers. Only himself knew how persistently he did overtask those powers—how, while poring over accounts, writing letters, and going to and fro about the City, he was all the time engaged, either latently or actively, in a mesh of speculation regarding his own personal affairs—how he was always pursuing two distinct, trains of thought; living earnestly in the present, yet projecting himself no less earnestly into the future; weighing probabilities, balancing risks, forecasting issues. These were facts of mental labor known only to himself.

But they were facts that told upon him heavily in many ways—that kept his pulse feeble, and his hand tremulous, and his eye unnaturally bright—that filled his mother's heart with apprehension, and caused even Captain Frank Hay to shake his head and look doubtful when any talk arose of the next expedition of the *Stormy Petrel*.

"If, as you say, the young man is really a lord, it ain't in reason that he'll go out again, Sir," said Mr. Timothy Knott, discussing this point with his employer the morning of the day after the party.

"That will be for himself to decide," replied Mr. Hardwicke, thoughtfully; his eyes fixed upon a letter that lay open on his desk.

"It's my opinion that a man is bound to keep in his own station," said the head clerk. "A lord is a lord—a supercargo is a supercargo."

"He is the best supercargo I ever had in my employment," said Mr. Hardwicke.

"But it ain't becoming in him to fill the situation," urged Mr. Timothy Knott. "I might as well clap on a star and a blue ribbon, and push my way into the House of Lords!"

Mr. Hardwicke shook his head gravely.

"Becoming or unbecoming," said he, "there are few things I should regret so much as the loss of his services. He is to be here, however, at eleven, and then, I suppose, the matter will be decided. By-the-way, Mr. Knott, let there be no staring or whispering in the office when he comes through."

"Staring or whispering!" echoed the head clerk. "Bless me, Sir, how am I to prevent it? The young men will stare and whisper if they choose."

"And let him be shown in without announcing him by name. It will be less awkward, under the circumstances."

Mr. Knott retired, muttering; and Mr. Hardwicke, having glanced at his watch, went on with the examination of his morning letters. Of these a goodly pile was lying beside his desk. Some he dismissed with a glance—some he read through twice over—some he flung into the waste-paper basket—some he carefully selected and put aside for future reference. But that particular letter which was before him during his conversation with the managing clerk he placed under a paper-weight apart from the rest.

At eleven, true to the clock as a man of business should be, De Benham was shown in.

Mr. Hardwicke received him with a curious mixture of *emproisement* and embarrassment, and placed a chair for him near the fire. De Benham, shivering, stretched his hands toward the flame; and Mr. Hardwicke saw that he looked pale, and that his hands were thin and transparent.

"It is a bitter morning, my lord," he said.

"Bitter indeed," replied De Benham.

"But we are in December now; and winter should be wintry."

"Just so," said De Benham, dreamily.

And there the conversation dropped. Mr. Hardwicke coughed, fidgeted, stirred the fire, knew not what to say next. Presently De Benham looked up.

"There is one point, Mr. Hardwicke," he said, "upon which we had better understand each other at once. After what took place last evening at your house, there will, of course, be occasions when I must take my father's title, and do my best to sustain it worthily. But here I am plain Temple De Benham—your supercargo—at your disposal, and subject to your commands."

"Then your lordship proposes to go on—"

"To go on with the career I have chosen? Undoubtedly."

"And to venture out again with the *Stormy Petrel*?"

"Probably. But it is upon that subject that I have come here to consult you to-day."

"It is the one subject I am myself most anxious to discuss," replied the merchant, taking from under the paper-weight the letter he had previously laid aside. "Do me the favor to read this, my lord. It is from my agent in Liverpool. He tells me that the *Stormy Petrel* will be ready to put to sea again in about a week."

De Benham took the letter, read, and returned it without a word. Mr. Hardwicke looked at him anxiously.

"It will, of course, be an immense satisfaction to me," said he, "if you decide to go. I should no longer have any confidence in the speculation if you were to withdraw from it."

De Benham, gnawing the ends of his moustache, as was his wont when thinking earnestly, paused before replying.

"Mr. Hardwicke," he said at length, "I will be plain with you. The one thing necessary to me above all other things is—money. Without it, I can do nothing. With it, I can do much that is to me of the highest importance."

"Naturally—naturally," murmured Mr. Hardwicke. "A nobleman must have means to keep up his rank in society."

"I am not thinking of society," said De Benham, with a flash of scornful impatience; "nor yet of my rank. I am thinking of an honorable

name to be rescued from oblivion—of a ruined home to be rebuilt—of old territorial rights to be repurchased. For these things I must have money—more than I may hope ever to earn as supercargo on board the *Stormy Petrel*."

Mr. Hardwicke smiled a doubtful smile.

"Your lordship, I think, has not hitherto had much to complain of," he said. "There are not many occupations in which sixty thousand pounds may be made in six months without employment of capital."

"True—but I am now a capitalist."

Mr. Hardwicke looked grave.

"I had hoped," he said, "for permission to offer your lordship the benefit of my experience in the matter of investments. You could not do better, for instance, than repurchase old family property—or worse than embark your first gains in any kind of hazardous speculation. For myself, I have always regarded speculation in the light of an expensive amusement, and speculation in earnest as simple insanity. When, for example, I embarked in our late enterprise, I was prepared to lose fifty thousand pounds. But had that sum constituted the whole, or nearly the whole of my capital, I would as soon have gone through the Bankruptcy Court as risk it in the *Stormy Petrel*. But I beg your pardon, my lord. I am offering an unsolicited advice."

"You speak like a friend, Mr. Hardwicke, and I am grateful to you."

"At all events, I speak candidly."

"So candidly, that I will be equally candid with you. It is my present intention to buy up, if possible, so much of the Benhampton estate as comprised originally the home farm, the park, the church, and the castle ruins. I hope I may strike this bargain for about fifteen thousand pounds. Having tied up so much of my capital, I think I am justified in speculating with the rest."

"I would earnestly recommend your lordship to consider the matter very fully first," said the merchant.

"Good Heavens! what else have I been doing but considering it, day and night, for months past?" exclaimed De Benham, getting up impatiently, and walking to and fro about the room.

"I think, my lord, you said you wished to consult with me on this subject," said Mr. Hardwicke. "If so, will you give me some idea of your plans?"

"I have no actual plans as yet," replied De Benham. "I have projects—which are, however, dependent on the results of my visit to Benhampton. And I have a proposal to make to you."

Mr. Hardwicke declared his readiness to listen to any proposal that "his lordship" might make; so De Benham resumed his seat and proceeded, very clearly and earnestly, and at some length, to explain his wishes. He began by reminding Mr. Hardwicke that his (De Benham's) capital was as yet but partially realized. Of the last two cargoes of cotton only a small quantity had hitherto been sold; and the rest, in accordance with his own advice, was being held back till such time as there should be a still further rise in the market. Twenty thousand of his gains—perhaps more—were therefore locked up in Mr. Hardwicke's Liverpool warehouse; so that, supposing he invested £15,000 in the purchase of land, he would have only £25,000 in present money to risk in

speculation. He then explained that there were two ways in which he had thought that he might possibly conduct his speculations—one way being entirely to separate his interests from those of Mr. Hardwicke; to buy, or hire, a small swift steamer (numbers of which were already being built for this very work on the Mersey and the Clyde), and go on running the blockade at his own exclusive risk and profit—the other way being to associate himself with Mr. Hardwicke on equal terms; become a joint proprietor in the *Stormy Petrel*, and carry on the trade for their mutual benefit.

"It is scarcely necessary for me to point out the advantages or disadvantages that might result to yourself, Mr. Hardwicke," he said, "from this last arrangement. Entertaining it, you would insure the benefit of my past experience; and your loss, in case of capture, would be diminished by one-half. On the other hand, you would doubtless find no difficulty in securing the services of an able supercargo, and your gains would be double. It is for you, as a man of business, to balance the *pros* and *cons*, and make your election."

Mr. Hardwicke leaned back in his chair, half closed his eyes, and deliberated.

"When do you propose to go down to Benhampton, my lord?" he asked.

"This evening."

"You will not remain there very long?"

"I propose staying the whole of to-morrow, and returning either by a night train or by some very early train the following morning. Would you like to take till then, Mr. Hardwicke, to consider my proposal?"

"I should. And, in the mean time, I will also consider whether some less hazardous and laborious road to fortune might not be open to you."

De Benham shook his head.

"I think I have exhausted conjecture on that score," he said. "This is a golden opportunity—such a golden opportunity as none of us need hope to see again; and we must make the most of it while it lasts."

And then he rose to take his leave.

"Will you dine with us, my lord, the day of your return?" said Mr. Hardwicke. "I will take care that no one else is invited, and then we can talk these matters over in the evening."

To this invitation De Benham replied that he should be happy to do so, unless detained in Monmouthshire; in which case, however, he would telegraph to Mr. Hardwicke at Strathellan House.

"By-the-way, my lord," said the merchant, "I have, as you desired, opened an account for you at my banker's, and lodged on deposit in your name the sum due to you on our last division of profits. I have also placed the sum of £2500 to your current account—as a testimonial, if you will permit me to say so, of the gratitude and admiration with which I regard your gallant conduct in the recapture of the *Stormy Petrel*."

"Mr. Hardwicke!"

"This is your pass-book," continued the other. "You will find your deposit receipt in the pocket."

"But it is impossible that I should accept this present."

"Pray do not say so; do not even call it a

present. It is entirely your due—a pure matter of business on both sides."

"You are most generous," said De Benham, "but indeed I can not take it."

"My lord, I am not generous. I am only doing what any other ship-owner would do under similar circumstances. I have laid aside £5000 for this purpose; half of that sum I consider should be yours; £1500 I have presented to Captain Frank Hay; and the rest I divide between the engineer and firemen. It seemed to me that this was an equitable partition of the sum."

"And your cousin Archie, who bore his own full share, and, when I was ill, part of my share, in all the work and the danger?"

"I have not forgotten Archibald Blyth, my lord," replied the merchant, somewhat stiffly. "I have raised his salary."

"Give him this money, or some share of this money which you offer me," said De Benham.

"He deserves it, Mr. Hardwicke, as much as any man on board; and he could take such a gift from your hands without any of those scruples which compel me to refuse it."

"Perhaps if I were to offer my testimonial in some other form you would regard it more favorably," said the merchant.

"No, Mr. Hardwicke, I should not. I had a direct personal interest in the cargo of the *Stormy Petrel*, and in assisting to recapture the ship I was protecting that interest as well as yours. I deserve no reward, and I will accept none."

Mr. Hardwicke bowed.

"I have no alternative but to submit to your refusal, my lord," he said, "however widely I may dissent from your premises. I hope I have not offended you."

"I should be ashamed of myself if you had."

"With regard, however, to Archibald Blyth. Would it give you the least gratification if I made him a sharer in this testimonial?"

"It would give me great gratification, Mr. Hardwicke."

"Then I will put him down for five hundred pounds."

De Benham was delighted. He would have been still better pleased had the sum been doubled; but he was delighted all the same, and said so openly and warmly.

"I wish you every success in Monmouthshire, my lord," said Mr. Hardwicke, "and shall look forward to the honor of your company at dinner on Thursday."

"Many thanks," said De Benham, already at the door.

"But I should hardly have thought you were yet strong enough to travel by the night train."

"Strong enough, Mr. Hardwicke? Oh yes! I am strong enough to go from London to Soverato again without stopping!"

And then they shook hands, and De Benham went away.

Arriving at home after a long round, some two hours later, he found the little parlor blooming with flowers like a summer garden, and on the table a basket of hot-house grapes and pines.

"Why, *Mutter!*" he exclaimed, laughing, "has Jupiter descended upon us in a shower of camellias?"

"They are from your Miss Hardwicke," said Lady De Benham.

"So I conclude. What fruit for a painter!"

"I wish she had not sent it."

"Nay—it is meant civilly."

"I know that; but—"

"But what?"

"I wish for neither her gifts nor her acquaintance."

"My dear mother, the flowers and fruits are here, and you can not help taking them; but there is no reason why you should make Miss Hardwicke's acquaintance unless you choose."

"Accepting them, I am bound to call upon her," said Lady De Benham; "and how can I do that? I, who have visited no one for more than thirty years?"

"I will call for you, and leave your card."

"Oh dear! she will then be at liberty to return the visit."

De Benham smiled.

"But, *Mutter*," he said, "Miss Hardwicke is a lady."

Lady De Benham sighed, and shook her head.

"A City madam," she said; "overdressed—purse-proud—ostentatious. I know exactly the sort of person she is before I see her."

"No; Miss Hardwicke is none of those things. She is distant; but, I think, neither purse-proud nor ostentatious—certainly not overdressed. Mind, I do not like her; but I am bound to say she is a lady."

"But the card, if I can find a card, should be left to-morrow; and you are going away, my son, to-night."

"Then I will go round to Paddington by the Regent's Park, and leave it this very evening."

So Lady De Benham sought, and with some difficulty found, a visiting-card—yellow, antiquated, the last of its race; one of those she had in use during the first years of her married life—and Temple, without entering the gates, left it with the lodge-keeper at Strathellan House that evening, on his way to the station.

CHAPTER LII.

A HOUSE OF MOURNING.

BENHAMPTON in December, with a leaden sky overhead and a bitter east wind blowing, put on its dreariest aspect for the traveler who came in the next morning tired and shivering, after a long night in the train, a comfortless breakfast in Monmouth, and a drive of twelve miles in a jolting country fly. He had not gone down to the village on the occasion of his first visit; and now, as the driver whipped on his spiritless beast through the long straggling street, and pulled up at a dismal little inn, called the "Three Bottles," De Benham thought he had seldom seen a more unpromising locality. He alighted, however, at the "Three Bottles;" bade the flyman take out his horse and prepare to wait some hours; and then proceeded to find his way up to the castle on foot.

The village, as he walked back through it, impressed him even more disagreeably than at first sight. The cottages were dirty and dilapidated; the road was full of ruts and pools and heaps of garbage; the two or three women whom

he saw standing at their doors, and the half dozen squalid children playing at the corners, looked sickly and sullen; and the low stone bridge which he had to cross in order to strike up toward the castle hill spanned a sluggish rivulet, foul and fetid as an open sewer. All this, he told himself, showed how much a great proprietor was needed in the place. Spendthrifts and courtiers and absentees, the De Benhams of the Georgian era had, doubtless, been bad landlords, one and all; so that not even a tradition of better times would probably be found surviving among these poor folks. But there had been better times—there must have been better times—when the lord of the soil lived among and for his tenants, and was beloved and honored by them, as a fine old English nobleman should be. It would be a grand thing, a thing worth working and living for, to bring those days back again—to pull down these miserable hovels; to build; to drain; to plant; to establish schools; to pay good wages; to make the people healthy and happy!

Dreaming thus, De Benham scaled that windy height, on the verge of which, shattered and straggling, the long line of ruined battlements lifted its gray profile to the wintry sky.

He climbed slowly, for the hill on this side was steep, and he soon became tired and out of breath. Having reached the level of the walls, he felt he could go no farther without resting; so, cold as it was, he sat down for a few moments under the lee of a projecting buttress. Decidedly, he was not as good at a hill as he would have been two months back!

All this hill-side, it was plain to see, had once been included in the park; and yonder, in the direction farthest from the village, the boundaries had evidently extended for some distance along the valley. Stately clumps of elm and beech, now leafless, were scattered over the ground; and some three or four very ancient oaks—as old, perhaps, as Herne's oak at Windsor or Elizabeth's oak at Hatfield—still with gnarled and knotted roots clung painfully to the soil. The approach to the castle was on the other side, and there had once been an avenue; but of this only a few trees now remained. De Benham, while resting those few minutes, planned a new road that should wind round the base and across the slope of the hill; planted it with young trees; and saw, in his mind's eye, the red deer browsing once again in the summer shade.

Presently he rose and went round to the front, entering the castle precincts by what had once been a grand old Norman gateway. Hence his way to that side of the keep in which the family lived lay through the yard; past the stack-yard, which was full of stacks; and the barns, which were fast shut and padlocked; and the sheds, in which the great blue and red wagons were drawn up side by side, like boats on a sea-beach.

De Benham looked round, half expecting to see Farmer Bowstead's burly figure emerging from some of the out-buildings; but, instead of the master of the place, he saw only a few cocks and hens scratching about the gate of the stack-yard, a large mastiff half asleep in his kennel, and an old man tottering toward the stables with a load of straw upon his back. Altogether there was an air of great quiet—a look almost of Sunday, about the place. Every thing seemed at

rest, as it were, and put away. The very dog just lifted up his nose and laid it down again—too lazy to bark at the stranger.

Wondering somewhat at the stillness, De Benham then crossed the inner quadrangle, went straight up to the smart green door, and rang the bell.

The door was opened almost immediately by a tall young woman in black, who, being asked if Mr. Bowstead was at home, drew back hastily, called some one from the parlor, and went up stairs with her handkerchief to her eyes.

A big, hearty-looking man, also in black, then came out, bowed gravely, and said:

"My brother is dead, Sir. He was buried yesterday."

De Benham, shocked at the question he had asked, apologized for his intrusion.

"It is no intrusion, Sir," replied the big man.

"Will you be pleased to walk in?"

"I had no idea that I was coming to a house of mourning," said De Benham. "I ought not to come in."

"Oh yes, Sir—come in by all means. Are you from Monmouth?"

"I am from London. I came down by the night train."

The big man looked at him somewhat curiously, and preceded him into the parlor, where two more young women in deep mourning were seated by the window at some kind of black needle-work.

"A gentleman from London, my dears," said the uncle.

They both rose, and courtesied. De Benham took off his hat.

"And now, Sir," said the big man, "what will you take?"

De Benham protested that he needed nothing, having breakfasted at Monmouth.

"Mine," he said, hesitatingly, "is purely a business visit."

One of the Miss Bowsteads had already placed an arm-chair for him by the fire, while the other brought out wine and cake from the side-board.

"Business or pleasure, Sir, it's all one," replied he who acted as host. "You're bound to want a snap by this time. What! no more than that? Well, we dine at one."

The two girls now gathered up their work, and prepared to leave the room. The elder said something to her uncle in a low voice as she passed his chair.

"What I have to say can be said any where," urged De Benham, uneasily. "Out of doors, if you will take a turn through the ruins?"

"You are not in the way here, Sir. My nieces are now going up to prepare your room. What have you done with your things? Are they down at the 'Three Bottles'?"

This old-world hospitality—so free—so trustful—so biblical in its unquestioning simplicity—proffered as heartily in time of trouble as in time of joy—and proffered, moreover, before ever the stranger had told his name or mission—struck De Benham with a sort of delightful wonder. He excused himself, however, by declaring his intention of returning to London by the night train; whereupon the Miss Bowsteads retired, leaving him with their uncle.

"I ought to begin," he said, "by introducing myself. My name is De Benham."

"Not one of the old De Benhams of this place?"

"Yes—I am a descendant."

"Really, Sir? Well, now, I thought there wasn't one of those old De Benhams left."

"I was down here one day the summer before last," continued the young man. "Your brother took me all over the ruins. I think you said the late Mr. Bowstead was your brother?"

"Yes, Sir. Matthew Bowstead was my elder brother. I am Mark Bowstead, at your service."

"And my object in coming a second time," De Benham went on, "was to learn whether Mr. Bowstead would be inclined to part from the property."

"To part from it?" echoed Mr. Mark. "Do you mean—to sell it?"

"Yes. To sell it."

"Humph! And the purchaser?"

"Myself."

Mr. Mark Bowstead fidgeted in his chair and stared hard at the fire; but De Benham detected a gleam of satisfaction on his face.

"May I speak to you on this subject, regarding you as your brother's representative?" asked De Benham.

"Certainly. I am Matthew Bowstead's representative. I am one of his trustees and executors, and the guardian of his girls."

De Benham then proceeded to explain how, being a descendant of the old proprietary family, he had long desired to buy up the castle and adjoining lands; but that it had not hitherto been in his power to come forward with any proposal to that effect. Being now, however, in a position to offer any reasonable terms of purchase, and being, moreover, on the point of leaving England, he was anxious to learn whether such proposals were likely to meet with a favorable reception from the present owners.

Meanwhile Mr. Mark Bowstead's countenance went on brightening and expanding, and when De Benham paused for a reply he looked up and smiled. He said at once that he would be glad to dispose of the place, if, by disposing of it, he could do better for his nieces. That they should continue to live there alone was impossible. That the land should continue to be cultivated for their benefit was difficult and undesirable. To let it was what had been proposed; but even to letting it—considering that the proprietors were three young girls, likely, perhaps, to marry and have divided interests—there were many objections. Not the least of these objections lay in the fact that he, Mr. Mark Bowstead, was himself a steel-pen manufacturer at Birmingham, wholly ignorant of agricultural matters, and incapable, so far as his own personal knowledge was concerned, of exercising any kind of general supervision over farm property. To sell the estate "right out," as he expressed it, would, in fact, be a considerable relief to his own mind, and would also, he did not doubt, be satisfactory to the young ladies themselves. He then went on to say that he had spent the previous evening in looking through some of "poor Matthew's" books and papers; and that, although his brother seemed to have purchased the property at a moderate valuation, he had (according to certain statements left in his own handwriting) found the land in an impoverished condition. Hence large sums of money had since that time been ex-

pended upon surface-drainage, guano, and the like; all of which would have to be considered in the price paid by the next buyer.

Thus, in discussion and deliberation, the morning went by; and at one o'clock De Benham shared the plentiful hospitality of the farm-house table. The Misses Bowstead (not even in bereavement unmindful of the good-looking stranger) appeared in their best crape and paramatta, and were not a little fluttered to find that their guest was a De Benham of the ancient De Benham line. Had they not, for their own amusement and pleasure, rummaged the old coffers and dipped into the old family records, till, as their father once said, it had made "regular antiquarians" of them? And were they not as well informed about the glories, achievements, and alliances of those headless and noseless barons out yonder in Benhampton Church as if they—Emma, Isabella, and Matilda—were not Bowsteads, but themselves De Benhams "of that ilk?" All this they knew; and profound in proportion was their reverence for the name and race.

"He says he was here a year and a half ago," said Miss Emma that night, after the visitor was gone. "I remember it well. We never saw him; and poor dear father was so vexed that he wouldn't come in to tea."

"Yes; and father said he wasn't a bit of a gentleman!" exclaimed Bella. "But he's a most perfect gentleman—quite a Pelham or an Ernest Maltravers!"

"It's my belief that he's heir to the title," said Matilda, the youngest of the three.

But at this the others only laughed. Matty, they said, was so romantic—Matty was always dreaming of heroes in disguise.

"Hero or no hero," said Miss Bowstead, "he looks dreadfully delicate. I'm sure he's not strong enough to be traveling again all night in the train."

Some three days later, however, there came to Benhampton Castle a square-shaped business letter, written on Bath post-paper in a clear engrossing hand—a letter purporting to come from an eminent legal firm in the City, wherein it was set forth that, acting in the interests of their client, Lord De Benham, Messrs. Balfour and Black would have the honor to send their junior partner to Monmouth on a certain day, there to meet and confer with the solicitors and executors of the late Matthew Bowstead, Esquire, respecting the sale and purchase of such portion of the Benhampton estates as had passed into the hands of the said Matthew Bowstead, and also to inspect the title-deeds of the same.

"There now!" exclaimed Miss Matty, triumphantly, "didn't I say he was a lord?"

But the eldest Miss Bowstead only clasped her hands, and said:

"Oh, good gracious! And to think that we had only a roast loin of pork and a pair of chickens, and not even the best dinner-service on the table!"



this nineteenth century; probably the safest way, certainly the least troublesome. As to falling in love—literally pitching headlong over the precipice at the first tones of a winsome voice, or the first shaft from a pair of bright eyes—that, in truth, is an accident that now rarely happens in real life. The era of impulse is almost gone by. The times grow daily more prosaic. As the earth's crust goes on cooling, our blood cools with it. We come into the world older than did our fathers and grandfathers before us, and each generation is soberer than the last. Hence we no longer "fall" in love. Hence the very phrase, "love at first sight," is well-nigh out of date.

But although most people drift into it and few tumble into it, yet there are many who walk into it; and walking into love is a distinct phase of the disease. A man walks into love as he goes through an alley which he knows to be infected with fever—because it lies in his road; because he is too lazy or too careless to take the longer way round; because, perhaps, he even somewhat relishes the sense of danger.

Thus it was that Archie walked into love with Miss Alleyne. He did it deliberately, with his eyes open, conscious of his peril, yet making no effort to avoid it. The mischief was not yet done when he parted from her in the library that evening at Strathellan House; but the train was laid, and it needed but the tiniest spark to explode it. Instead of keeping out of the way of that spark, however, he marched, as it were, straight into the fire.

Having asked and obtained leave to call at Campden Hill the following day, he went home to his lodgings in Great Ormond Street, and sat with his feet on the fender half the night, smoking innumerable pipes, and thinking of the old days at Cillingford. How bright Miss Alleyne was then—how arch, how gay, how happy! He could see her now, in her light summer dress, flitting down the path by the river, presiding over the tea, trying to look grave at the whist table. He could almost hear the soft music of

CHAPTER LIII.

HOW ARCHIE WALKED INTO IT.

SOME people fall in love; others drift into it; others walk into it. Most of us drift into it. It is the ordinary, everyday, commonplace way of



"HE WENT HOME TO HIS BODGINGS IN GREAT ORMOND STREET, AND SAT WITH HIS FEET ON THE FENDER HALF THE NIGHT."

her voice as she read aloud, sitting in the shade of the tent while Mr. Alleyne was painting. And then her smile—what a flood of sunshine broke from her lips when she smiled!

Archie used to be jealous of Miss Alleyne in those Cillingford days, so that the magic of her smile and the music of her voice brought him little pleasure at the time. He remembered all this now. He even remembered that her gayety used sometimes to jar upon him. Good Heavens! what an insensible brute he must have been! Should he ever see her look so and smile so again! He feared—never. And then, loyal as it was his nature to be, he accused his friend bitterly. This, he told himself, was De Benham's work. This was the sacrifice that De Benham had offered up to ambition. Thinking thus, Archie's heart was filled with pity, and sympathy, and indignation. He would fain have constituted himself Miss Alleyne's champion, even though it should be to defend her against his friend. But she would accept no champion. She could not be brought to admit that De Benham was in the wrong. She was even ready, despite the logic of facts, to take part against herself, and do battle for the man she loved. For that she still loved him as well as ever—perhaps better than ever—was only too certain.

"But then," said Archie, filling his pipe afresh, and addressing himself to the Turk's head which formed the bowl thereof as if it were

a familiar friend—"but then, you see, that's the way with women. They're so awfully faithful. It doesn't matter a bit to them whether a fellow's kind or unkind to them; whether he's true, or whether he's false. They love him because he's himself—nothing but that. If he was ever so fond of them and he only happened to be somebody else, they wouldn't care a pin for him. No; not if he was a hero out of a novel!"

There was something so profound in this reflection that it carried Archie completely out of his depth. The more he pondered and puzzled over it, the more intricate it seemed to become. At length the fire waxed low and the pipe was again smoked out; and then he looked at his watch, and finding that it was just three o'clock in the morning, went off to bed.

Now it is evident that any prudent man who found his thoughts running in such grooves as these, and yet was convinced that the lady of whom he was thinking had given away her heart for good and all to another, would have taken timely counsel with himself, and have withdrawn beyond the reach of temptation. He would not, for instance, have kept his appointment the next day at Kensington. But Archie was not a prudent man. He not only kept his appointment, but in order to keep it with especial *éclat* he plunged into all kinds of lavish expenses, such as new gloves, new boots, a new Paris hat, the bluest of blue cravats, and the horriest of

horseshoe pins. Nor was this all. He went to a certain livery-stable near Great Ormond Street, and there hired a retired hunter—a somewhat gaunt, but tolerably decent animal; and thus mounted, rode soberly and circumspectly down to Kensington. Soberly and circumspectly, not because he was unsteady in his saddle, or uncertain of his reins, or afraid for any similar reasons to spur on his gallant steed; but because it had rained heavily the night before, and, the roads being deep with slush and mire, he was fain to present himself before Miss Alleyne with as few splashes as might be. For Archie, though a City man, rode creditably, and looked rather well on horseback.

He found Miss Alleyne alone, which was delightful; and she told him she had been expecting him, which was still more delightful. Then he took a chair at the opposite side of the hearth, and looked at her as she sat there in her dark winter dress with the flicker of the fire-light on her cheek.

Presently Miss Alleyne led the conversation to the subject of the *Stormy Petrel*.

"I have been wishing that you would come some day and tell me about it," she said, "ever since I heard you were back in England."

"Have you really?" said Archie, in a flutter of gratification.

"And in last night's crowd conversation was impossible."

"Quite impossible."

"You must have so much to tell that is interesting," said Miss Alleyne.

"What, about the recapture?"

"About the—the voyage altogether."

Archie twisted his hat and looked infinitely perplexed.

"I'm a bad hand at describing," said he.

"I'll send you last Saturday's *Shooting Star* instead. There's a splendid account of the whole affair in it, written by Charley Bennett—a friend of mine."

"I had rather hear your own account, Mr. Blyth," said Miss Alleyne.

"Well, it is almost mine. I supplied the facts."

Miss Alleyne sighed. No newspaper narrative would tell her what she wanted to know.

"We had a terrible storm, you know, after we had got possession of the vessel," said Archie. "I never knew what a storm was till then. If you had only seen the waves! they were almost black, and they rose higher than our masts."

"Was it the next day?" asked Miss Alleyne.

"No; the fourth day. You would have thought the sea and sky were coming together to destroy us."

"And this was while he lay ill!" she said, shuddering.

Then a light broke in upon Archie's mind, and he understood why Miss Alleyne had wished to see him ever since his return.

"Ah," he said; "you would like me to tell you about his illness!"

She looked down. Her color rose; her lip trembled.

"He might have died, you know," she said, half apologetically.

"Well, yes; he might—and he very nearly did. But then, after all, you see, he didn't," replied Archie.

And then, very patiently and circumstantially, he went back over the oft-told tale. He told how De Benham, being wounded, went on day after day, taking his share of work and refusing to admit that he suffered; how he was found lying on the deck, insensible, the evening of that fourth day, when the storm was over; how, even after this, he rose and went about his duties the next morning, till at length his limbs would bear him up no longer; how, as each succeeding day passed by, he lay in his narrow bed, now burning, now shivering, sometimes feebly conscious, sometimes delirious, with no doctor save the captain, and no nurse but Archie; how, when they at length reached Fayal, and the *Stormy Petrel*, battered, disabled, trailing her wounded fin, struggled wearily into the port of Horta, they sent for medical aid, believing all the time that it was too late, and that his last hour was almost come; how, the vessel being now at anchor and all quiet on board, he fell that very night into a profound sleep, that lasted twelve hours; woke free from fever; was carried ashore in a litter; nursed by a sister from the convent; and given back to life, as it seemed, by a miracle—all this Archie told of De Benham; and if, as he said of himself, he was a bad hand at describing, he at all events made up in earnestness what he wanted in eloquence. He tried to remember and detail every little incident that he thought could interest her, even to the first day when his patient came down from his bedroom, and the first drive he was able to take in a sort of carriage, lent by the governor of the island.

"It was such a lovely place for an invalid to recover in," said Archie; "and such a climate! Never too hot; and fanned by the most delicious sea-breezes, morning and evening. The people are a sort of tropical Portuguese. They were gathering in the grapes while we were there; and there you saw the vineyards all reaching up the hill-sides; and groves of oranges, and lemons, and palms—and then, on the slopes inland, between the sea and the mountains, there were fields divided by hedgerows, just like the coast of Hampshire; and above these, on higher ground, miles and miles of chestnut wood; and then, highest of all, the great purple peaks that had once been volcanoes. I climbed one of those peaks one day, and went down into the empty crater. It was like a huge green basin lined with forest trees; and down at the bottom was a plain of rich pasture. And then, in the middle of the plain, there arose another little cone covered with trees and bushes."

"Did you go alone?" asked Miss Alleyne.

"No; I had a guide."

Then, suddenly apprehending her meaning, Archie added:

"It was when De Benham was getting better, you know. I started at daybreak—hours before he was awake."

"He was not yet strong enough to go with you?"

"He was never strong enough to go any where while we were in the island," said Archie. "He wouldn't wait to get strong. He was only just able to walk with the help of my arm when we started for home again."

"And where you lodged, could you see those mountains and all that beautiful country from your windows?" asked Miss Alleyne.

"Yes; there was a sort of little vine-trellis running all round the house; and I used to wheel his couch out there every morning, so that he could lie in the shade and watch the sea, and the town, and the hills all day long."

"And sometimes you used to read to him?"

"Yes, when I could get any thing English to read. And then, too, I used to go down to the port and pick up little scraps of news from the sailors, to amuse him. He wasn't a bit dull, Miss Alleyne. Nobody could be dull in such a beautiful place as Fayal."

"Nor with so kind a friend always at hand. How good you have been to him, Mr. Blyth!"

But Archie would not hear his own praises.

"Oh no!" he exclaimed. "There is no merit in doing any thing for those one loves. De Benham is my best friend. Or rather," he added, sadly, "he was my best friend before I knew he was a lord."

"Nay, I hope he will be your best friend, and you his, Mr. Blyth, all your lives long," said Miss Alleyne. "He will need you more than ever now."

Archie shook his head.

"If he needs me he will have me," replied he.

"But he won't need me, Miss Alleyne. I shall drop out of his life now, I know. Besides—"

He was going to say, "Besides, he will be off again before long;" but he checked himself, not to give her pain.

"And besides what?" asked Miss Alleyne.

"I—I scarcely know—except, perhaps, that a man is happier when he chooses his friends from among his equals."

With this Archie rose to go; and Miss Alleyne told him that he must come again, when her father should be at home.

"And then," she said, "I shall expect to hear more about your travels, Mr. Blyth. You don't know how much your adventures have interested me. Besides," she added, artfully, "you relate them so well."

Archie blushed and stammered something, he scarcely knew what.

"Good-by, then. I shall tell my father that you are coming—very soon."

"Ah, I shall come only too soon!" said poor Archie, already on the high-road to destruction.

Then Miss Alleyne gave him a smile that almost turned his head upon the spot; and away he went, with his ears tingling and his heart in his mouth.

Meanwhile the retired hunter was marching majestically up and down outside the house, under the care and guidance of a small shoe-black in a scarlet blouse. Having dismissed this humble equerry, Archie sprang into the saddle, administered a sly dig with his off spur, so causing him, steed to prance and caper like a fiery Pegasus in sight of Miss Alleyne's window, and then cantered off toward the Park.

Presently the canter subsided into a walk, and Archie fell into a brown-study.

It had been a delightful visit while it lasted, and Miss Alleyne had been charming. She had made him talk, she had listened to him, praised him, invited him to go again, smiled upon him like an angel. He left her presence in a rapture of delight. But now the rapture had subsided, and he began to see of how much worth these pleas-

ant nothings were. Would she, he asked himself, have cared to listen to him, if he had not talked to her of De Benham? Would she have asked him to come again, if it were not that she hoped to hear more about De Benham? What cared she for his visits, or his adventures, or even his existence, except in so far as he reflected one fact or phase of the existence of De Benham? For her, De Benham, clearly, was all in all. He might desert her, forget her, marry another—but she would love him in spite of every wrong, and go on loving him to the end. As for her pleasant ways and gracious speeches, what were they but the arts and wiles of her sex? Was she not a very woman through and through? Was she not such a very woman that, though a man should stake his heart upon the glitter of her smile or the ring of her words, she would yet pay him back with counterfeits, and lavish her true coin upon the prodigal who cared only to scatter it to the four winds of heaven?

Absorbed in these reflections—or rather, absorbed in less definite reflections to this effect—Archie rode slowly homeward; and twice, as he went pondering, he shook his head, and twice he said to himself:

"A fellow would be a fool to go often."

But for all that he went again the very next Saturday afternoon; and again in the course of the following week. And each time he talked to her about De Benham; each time she smiled upon him; each time he staid longer than before. Soon he became an *habitué* of the house—an intimate—a privileged guest—free of the painting-room—free even of Mr. Alleyne's Sunday afternoons. And so he walked into love with his eyes open.

CHAPTER LIV.

A WAIF FROM THE FAR WEST.

DE BENHAM went down into Monmouthshire on the Tuesday night, having left his mother's card with the lodge-keeper at Strathellan House as he drove by. The next day, accordingly, found Lady De Benham oppressed by the conviction that Miss Hardwicke would return the civility by calling upon her. Why, she asked herself, should she be compelled to make this Miss Hardwicke's acquaintance, whether she desired it or not—nay, when she so distinctly did *not* desire it? And then she pictured this "City madam" rattling up to the house in a yellow carriage with two, perhaps three, men-servants in blue and scarlet liveries—rustling across the narrow slip of front garden in velvet and sables—filling the tiny parlor with her presence—tattling of her conservatories, her orchard-houses, and all the riches that were hers. Perhaps, mindful of her own splendor, she would carry herself toward Lady De Benham with infinite condescension; or overmindful, on the other hand, of the difference in their rank, be fulsomely obsequious. And would not the one be as hateful as the other? What if she, Lady De Benham, were to go out, and remain out, the whole afternoon? The temptation to do this was great; but so also was the difficulty of doing it. In June, for instance, one might have taken a book, gone up to Hampstead, and spent the day under a tree in some quiet corner of the heath; but in December—

no; to one who owned no friends or acquaintances in London there was no resource save bazars and picture-galleries, and sooner than undertake such an expedition alone, Lady De Benham would have faced a whole legion of "City madams." So, half apprehensive, half defiant, wholly reluctant, she staid at home, and awaited Miss Hardwicke's visit.

Thus the morning and afternoon wore on, and at every sound of wheels she looked up, dreading to see that yellow carriage at the door; for Lady De Benham had quite made up her mind that it must be a yellow carriage, and that the liveries and all connected with it must be of the showiest and gaudiest kind. Then it began to grow dusk, and still no Miss Hardwicke made her appearance.

And now, with all a woman's inconsistency, Lady De Benham began to be angry with her for not coming. Had not she, the elder lady, the married lady, the lady of title, accepted this Miss Hardwicke's present; sent her card in acknowledgment thereof; sent it, moreover, by the hands of her son; and was it not obviously Miss Hardwicke's place to call upon her the next day in person? That she did not do so proved, of course, that she was ignorant of the usages of society; but after all, was not such ignorance to be expected from her?

Just, however, as the dusk was deepening and the lamp-lighter was coming round, a little, plain, dark blue brougham drew up quietly at the gate, and Miss Hardwicke, unattended by even a single footman, let herself out, and knocked softly at the door. It was not yet so dark outside but that Lady De Benham could see how plain and unpretending the little carriage was, and how equally plain and unpretending was the dress of the lady alighting from it. Was it possible that this should be the "City madam" of her imaginings?

Then, involuntarily holding her breath, she heard a low, grave voice asking for her by name; and then the parlor door opened, and Miss Hardwicke, announced by the lodging-house servant, came in.

The first greetings were gone through almost in silence. Lady De Benham, fluttered for the moment by this derangement of all her preconceived ideas, put out her hand somewhat hesitatingly, murmured an inaudible welcome, and motioned her visitor toward a chair beside the fire. Miss Hardwicke, courteous and self-possessed, with just the right shade of deference in her manner, took the proffered seat.

The ordinary commonplaces having been exchanged, the conversation turned upon the affair of the *Stormy Petrel*. Miss Hardwicke alluded to "the masterly stratagem by which Lord De Benham recovered possession of the vessel." Temple's mother spoke in praise of Archibald Blyth, and of the share he had borne in the dangers and hardships of the voyage.

"I feel that I have been guilty of some injustice toward Archie," said Miss Hardwicke. "Knowing that he was not clever, I gave him credit for nothing but a good temper and a light heart."

"I think we are all too apt to gauge people's hearts by their heads," replied Lady De Benham. "I underrated Mr. Blyth when first Temple became acquainted with him at that little church

in the City. I am ashamed to remember it now. But for his devotion, my son might have died at the Azores."

"It is something to have a talent for friendship," said Miss Hardwicke.

"It is an uncommon talent."

"That is because it is a monopoly in the hands of the men."

"Nay, I hope not that."

"History would seem to show it. All the illustrious friendships of antiquity are men's friendships."

"Beginning with Cain and Abel," said Lady De Benham.

Miss Hardwicke smiled.

"We are told they were brothers," she said; "but not, I think, that they were friends. The rule of life seems to point the other way."

It was Lady De Benham's turn to smile now. She loved a spice of satire. In the old days, when heart and pocket were light together, her son's talk used to bubble over with epigram. But those days were past. Wealth had evaporated wit, and epigram died off the surface of his talk when Cotton was infused into his system. This, however, was according to the nature of things. Unto few men is it given to serve Mirth and Mammon; and, smite as one may, no flint that ever came out of a chalk-bed will strike sparks from gold. Lady De Benham (who, because her ways were secluded, loved to have amusement brought home to her in the form of entertaining conversation) missed the pungent sayings and flashes of merriment of those pleasant times. And so, finding that Miss Hardwicke could talk, and that her talk had in it just that coveted streak of satire, the elder lady smiled. The smile heralded a thaw.

"I have not yet thanked you, Miss Hardwicke," she said, "for these beautiful flowers. I look round the room and fancy it is summer."

"I hope you will let me perpetuate that illusion till May," said Miss Hardwicke.

Lady De Benham froze again, suddenly. She could accept a civility, and accept it graciously; but that it should be proposed to lay her under a long series of similar obligations—this, surely, was too much like a liberty!

Miss Hardwicke saw her error, and hastened to repair it.

"Or, rather, I would hope so," she added, with considerable self-possession, "if I were not a stranger. As a stranger, I am not, of course, entitled to usurp the privileges of Lady De Benham's friends."

To this emendation a scarcely perceptible bow was the only reply. Lady De Benham thawed not as rapidly as she froze.

Then came some more commonplaces—this time about Zollenstrasse and life in Germany; and presently Miss Hardwicke rose to take her leave. All this time Lady De Benham remained frigid and dignified. She had smiled once; but she was not going to smile again. Miss Hardwicke, meanwhile, had her *coup d'état* in reserve.

"Lady De Benham," she said, when about half-way to the door, "I have brought something—something which I think will have an interest for you—a relic—"

"A relic?"

"It is in the brougham. With your leave, I will bring—"



"IT IS THE PENNANT OF THE STORMY PETREL," SAID MISS HARDWICKE."

Lady De Benham's hand was instantly on the bell.

"If there's any thing you desire fetched from your carriage, Miss Hardwicke, the servant will go for it." But Miss Hardwicke preferred to fetch it for herself.

And now Lady De Benham fumed inwardly. What could this thing be that her visitor had brought in the brougham? Not another pres-

ent? If so, what bad taste! What presumption! To accept it, whatever it might be, would of course be out of the question. It must be declined; civilly, no doubt, but pointedly—and Miss Hardwicke must have her lesson.

Meanwhile the servant, putting her own interpretation on the ring, brought the lamp; so that when Miss Hardwicke came back, she found the room lighted.

The two ladies now for the first time beheld each other clearly. Miss Hardwicke, laying a somewhat bulky parcel on the table, saw before her a pale, slender, dignified woman, with sharply cut features and dark hair streaked with gray; a woman who might have been as young as forty-five or as old as fifty, and whose eyes, like her son's, were deep and earnest. Lady De Benham, scanning her visitor with a curiosity not wholly friendly, saw and acknowledged that rare imperial beauty of which she had already heard so much.

Miss Hardwicke opened the parcel, and a large, soiled, shabby-looking bundle of some kind of scarlet twill emerged from the paper wrappings. This piece of scarlet twill measured about three yards in length and six inches in width at the broadest part. It terminated in a point at one end; was ornamented at the other end by a little white cross upon a ground of dark blue; and was almost cut in two about half-way along by a great, ragged, semicircular rent, like a bite snapped out by a shark.

"It is the pennant of the *Stormy Petrel*," said Miss Hardwicke. "Here, you see, is where a cannon-shot went through it, just before the accident happened. I thought you might like to keep it, in memory of your son's adventure."

A flush of pleasure rose to Lady De Benham's pallid cheek. She spread the pennant out, and examined it eagerly.

"It is indeed a relic," she said, "and a very precious one! Miss Hardwicke, how am I to thank you enough?"

It was not a thaw now; it was a sudden breaking up of the ice. Had Miss Hardwicke been one whit less unapproachable (for even while she was making this great effort to lay aside her habitual haughtiness she was still unapproachable), Lady De Benham would have taken her in her arms and kissed her.

"Pray do not thank me at all," said Miss Hardwicke. "My brother went down to see the vessel at Liverpool when she first came into port, and he brought me home this pennant as a curiosity. I thought it would be something more than a curiosity to you, and that you had a better right to it than myself."

And then she took her leave. Lady De Benham went with her to the parlor door.

"I do not make visits, Miss Hardwicke," she said. "I go nowhere. But I hope you will come and see me again."

To this Miss Hardwicke replied, very gracefully, that such permission, coming from Lady De Benham, was a privilege; and, besides saying so, she looked as if she thought it—which pleased Lady De Benham so much that she pressed her guest's hand quite cordially at parting.

The next morning, when De Benham came home, the first thing he saw was the old red pennant suspended over the chimney-piece. His mother hastened to tell him what flag it was, whence it came, and all the story of her interview with Miss Hardwicke.

"And how do you like her, *Mutter?*" he asked, when the tale was told.

"My son," said Lady De Benham, "I think she is charming."

CHAPTER LV.

A MOMENTOUS QUESTION.

"IF, my lord, you are determined to go—"

"I am determined to go," said De Benham.

"At no matter what cost of health—"

"At all costs."

"Then I am willing to fall in with your proposal. You can, if you desire it, become part proprietor of the *Stormy Petrel*, and equal partner with myself in the risks and profits of all future expeditions."

"That is well."

It was the evening of the day of De Benham's return from Benhampton. He had that very afternoon been lying upon his bed in an almost fainting state for more than two hours; but, rallying by sheer force of will, had risen and dressed in time to keep his appointment at Strathellan House. He was now sitting face to face with Mr. Hardwicke, in a huge easy-chair before the dining-room fire. They had dined, and Miss Hardwicke had withdrawn, leaving her brother and his guest to their business conference and their wine. The decanter stood within reach, and Mr. Hardwicke occasionally helped himself to a glass of port; but De Benham's glass stood by untasted.

"How soon, my lord, shall you be prepared to go?" asked the merchant.

"How soon, positively, will the *Stormy Petrel* be ready to start?"

"My agent says in about a week—that letter was written on Monday, and to-day is Thursday. For 'about a week,' read ten days. To ten days add ten more for stowage. Say roundly, she will be ready to drop down the Mersey this day three weeks."

De Benham paused to consider.

"I should be unwilling to leave England," he said, "before these matters which I am negotiating in Monmouthshire are concluded."

"If they are not concluded by that time," said Mr. Hardwicke, "the vessel can wait a week longer."

"I should hope it will all be settled in three weeks," replied De Benham. And then he sighed, and lay back wearily in his chair.

Mr. Hardwicke looked at him.

"I think," he said, "a man should be in robust health to venture upon such arduous and exciting work."

De Benham sat up directly.

"That means that you think me looking ill," he said. "But I am not ill. I am naturally pale. I was never any thing but pale. How strange it is that every one will have it I am ill!"

And by the very way that he changed his position, by the very way he answered, to say nothing of his wasted features and the purple hollows round his eyes, it was plainly to be seen how ill he was.

"You have been ill, my lord, and you look as if you had been ill," replied Mr. Hardwicke, gently; "and I am sure you would do better to wait for the spring. Better still, perhaps, to give up blockade-running altogether."

"Give up blockade-running altogether! Why should I do that?"

"Because you are too good for the work. A man of your lordship's abilities, if you will permit me to say so, is thrown away upon pur-

suits which would prosper as well in inferior hands."

"But I think I have already explained to you, Mr. Hardwicke, that I want money."

"True; but there are other paths—other resources—"

"Where should I find any path by following which I could make sixty thousand pounds in seven months? You told me yourself, Mr. Hardwicke, only the day before yesterday, that you knew of none."

"I think, my lord, I said there were 'few' occupations so immediately profitable; I should have been in error to say there were none. Larger sums than sixty thousand pounds have been made on the Stock Exchange in a single day."

"Ay, and in a single night at the Homburg table. No, no, Mr. Hardwicke, blockade-runner though I be, I'm not a gambler in that sense."

"Well, there is yet another lottery," said Mr. Hardwicke, hesitatingly.

"And that is—"

"Marriage."

"Marriage!"

"Yes, my lord—marriage. You are young. You have talents, accomplishments, personal advantages, a title. What woman of fortune would refuse you?"

"What! sell myself to age and ugliness, like Hogarth's spendthrift!" exclaimed De Benham. "Many thanks."

Mr. Hardwicke glanced at his sister's bust—the famous bust by Costoli of Florence, which stood, it may be remembered, with its background of ruby velvet drapery, at the head of the dining-room in Strathellan House.

"Wealth is not necessarily inseparable from age and ugliness," he said. "I see no reason why you should not obtain youth and beauty into the bargain."

De Benham caught the glance—detected the faint inflection of emphasis in Mr. Hardwicke's voice. He almost started in his chair as their meaning broke upon him. Then for several seconds there was silence. Mr. Hardwicke looked into the fire; De Benham looked at Mr. Hardwicke.

"I fear," he said, at length, speaking very slowly, and, as it were, reluctantly—"I fear no lady who was young, and beautiful—and rich, would feel flattered by the proposals of one whose first motive was, obviously, to improve his own fortunes."

Mr. Hardwicke coughed dubiously.

"One would scarcely so represent the matter," he said, "in making such proposals."

"Pardon me. I should place the matter in that light, and no other," replied De Benham. "I should ask the lady—supposing such a lady to be found—whether she would be willing to unite with me in rebuilding the fortunes of an ancient house; in raising up a noble castle from its ruins; in buying back lands and lordships long since alienated into the hands of strangers. And I should ask her if to do these things, and to become the mother of a renewed line of English barons, would seem to her a fit and desirable end to which to devote her life."

"It would be a noble mission," said Mr. Hardwicke, thoughtfully, "and one that might well tempt a woman of lofty character."

And again his eyes strayed—this time, perhaps, involuntarily—toward the bust.

"I could not undertake to talk of love to any woman—now," De Benham said, gloomily. "I live for this one object, and I am absorbed by it. It is my ruling passion. I have no room in my heart for a second."

Mr. Hardwicke murmured something to the effect that marriages of esteem were oftentimes the most lastingly happy; and then silence fell upon them again, till the merchant proposed that they should go up to the drawing-room.

The hour that followed passed slowly. De Benham, with the foregoing conversation still fresh upon his mind, felt as though he were tongue-tied. His host was fidgety and ill at ease. Only Miss Hardwicke (unconscious of this new dream of ambition in which her brother had begun to indulge) remained unembarrassed and impassive as usual. She talked, however, a little; and being asked to sing, sang one song—a mournful, majestic melody adapted to that Lament of Shelley's, which begins, "Oh, world! oh, life! oh, time!"

Claudia Hardwicke sang well—so well that even De Benham's trained taste was satisfied; and the song she sang suited her voice, and, as it were, became her; for there is a becomingness even in the choice of a song, if singers did but know it. Miss Hardwicke knew it perfectly. She would no more have condescended to an arch canzonet like Bishop's "Love hath eyes," or to a fiery scena like Rossi's "Ah, rendimi," than she would have sung a parody out of a burlesque.

So she sang this solemn, passionless melody, and De Benham listened. As the last low, rich notes died away he held his breath, and thought he should like to hear her sing a certain song that he had written to some words of Goethe's years ago, when he was a student at Zollenstrasse. He did not, however, ask her to sing again; but when she rose from the piano took his leave and went away.

That night he could not sleep—the next day, and for many a day after, he could not rest—for thinking of all that Mr. Hardwicke had said to him. Surely the drift of those hints was obvious and unmistakable! He might mend his fortune with a wealthy marriage—no woman with money would refuse him—youth, beauty, and riches were not an impossible combination: what could this mean, unless it meant that he would do well to offer his hand and title to Claudia Hardwicke?

And then he asked himself, could he, should he, dared he, do this thing?

It would be wealth—wealth, immense and immediate. It would be the instant realization of his dreams. It would be rest from labor. It would be to gladden his mother's heart by never leaving her; by incurring no more perilous adventures; by cleansing himself at once and forever from the contamination of trade. It might be even more than this. It might be, if not the saving of his life, the saving of his fine constitution.

For, steel himself as he might against the unwelcome truth, he knew, and could not help knowing, that his strength did not come back to him. Having recovered up to a certain point, he seemed unable to get beyond that point. He

had even begun to suspect of late that he was growing weaker. What if he went out again with the *Stormy Petrel* and fell ill by the way? What if he remained an invalid for life? What if he were to die before his task was completed?

And then he reminded himself that he had vowed to complete that task at all costs. Ay, at all costs. He had already given up the woman and the art that he loved. He had already crushed back into his heart all the dearest hopes and loftiest aspirations of which that heart was capable. Why, then, should he hesitate now? Why falter before this final test? It was not, surely, more difficult to marry a woman whom he did not love, than to give up the woman whom he did love. The question was one of mere self-sacrifice, and, so far as he could see, involved no kind of injustice toward any one but himself. In such a marriage there could, at all events, be nothing dishonorable. If Miss Hardwicke was willing to marry for rank, he undoubtedly would be justified in marrying for money. It would be a fair bargain, and nothing more—a bargain from which such words as Love and Happiness must of necessity be excluded, but in which the balance of advantages on both sides would be strictly equal.

There were days and hours when De Benham argued the subject over with himself after this fashion; but again there were times when he saw it from quite an opposite point of view; when he told himself that he had no right to make such use of his ancient name and title—that to do so would be a mere ignoble bartering of noble things—that no end, however important in itself, would justify the employment of such means. Better, a thousand times better, that he should work on, no matter how long or how hard, and earn his riches for himself.

But then, should he ever again be strong enough to work hard? And should he be able to earn enough for his purpose? Supposing the American Civil War to come suddenly to an end, there would be an end also to blockade-running, and to profits at the rate of twelve hundred per cent. And then, again, all this money, if he indeed succeeded in earning it, would have to be made in trade; and to devote himself to trade for life would surely be as bad, if not worse, than to sell himself to a City heiress for her money.

Sometimes he asked himself if he could by any means bring himself to love Claudia Hardwicke; but his heart answered that question only too promptly. Claudia Hardwicke, with all her splendid beauty, was haughty, unlovable, unsympathetic. Her nature, he felt certain, had in it none of the tenderness of woman. She was cold through and through. He could admire her, in a certain critical, dispassionate way, as he might admire a fine statue. He could live with her on terms of mutual respect and courtesy. But he could never love her.

Love, love, love! Ah, folly! What had he now to do with love? Had he not dreamed that dream, and waked from it, long since? Had he not, like Paul Fleming, "laid the golden goblet gently down, knowing that he should behold it no more?" The question now was how best to keep his vow; how to restore in his own person and the persons of his descendants the ancient glories of his house; how to become, in any thing

like the full sense of the phrase, De Benham of Benhampton.

For a whole week he kept aloof from Prior's Walk, from the Hardwicks, from Archie, from every one; for a whole week he pondered thus, now arguing upon the one side and now upon the other, till his thoughts were weary of traveling round and round the one perplexing topic. Yet at the close of the week he was still asking himself what he should do, and was still vainly trying to arrive at some conclusion.

On the morning of the eighth day, however, while he was yet in this painful state of indecision, he received two letters, one of which was from a certain Mr. Morley Durrant, an architect, whom he had sent down to Benhampton to look over the ruins a day or two before; and the other from his solicitors, Messrs. Balfour and Black, of Bedford Row, Bloomsbury. De Benham read the lawyers' letter first. It ran thus:

"THURSDAY, February —, 1862.

"MY LORD,—Our junior partner, Mr. E. Black, has this day returned from Monmouth, having made a careful examination of the papers contained in the ancient chest mentioned by your lordship; and more especially of those deeds and charters which concern such portion of the Benhampton estates as passed, in 1856, into the hands of the late Mr. Matthew Bowstead.

"It appears, as one result of Mr. E. Black's investigations, that the landed property of the De Benham family could not, at one time, have extended over less than 60,000 statute acres. In other words, they must have owned nearly one-sixth part of the whole county of Monmouth, besides certain minor outlying fiefs and demesnes in the adjoining counties of Brecknockshire and Herefordshire. Of these lands, some now form integral portions of various private estates, and some have devolved to the Crown. Some also lie within the boundaries of the Forest of Dean.

"That part of the estate which was purchased from Colonel Smithson by the late Mr. Matthew Bowstead, in 1856, consists of only 720 acres, 400 of which would seem to have been originally park land, but which have been brought into cultivation within the last seventeen or eighteen years. For these 720 acres the trustees and executors of the said Matthew Bowstead require £50 per acre; in all, £36,000 sterling. Having compared this demand with the average value of land in that part of the country, we are of opinion that the price is excessive. The soil is, for the most part, light, poor, and hilly; whereas a tract of comparatively rich and fertile soil in the adjacent valley was, as we are credibly informed, sold not long since at £33 per acre. Knowing, however, that your lordship is influenced by a special interest in the choice of this locality, the trustees of the late Matthew Bowstead, acting in the interest of their wards and under the advice of their solicitors, seem disposed to exact an outside price, and will not, we fear, be induced to abate their demand. That is to say, they would probably not refuse £35,000 should you authorize us to offer that sum; but even this appears to be doubtful.

"Awaiting your lordship's further instructions, we remain

"Your lordship's obedient servants,

"BALFOUR, BLACK, AND CO."

The second letter may also be given in full :

"THURSDAY, February —, 1862.
VICTORIA STREET, WESTMINSTER.

"MR LORD,—I have in accordance with your wish visited the ruins of Benhampton Castle. I spent the greater part of two days upon the spot ; but it would require weeks of such study to construct any thing like an accurate plan of the edifice as it may have appeared a hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago.

"For the work of the restorer, my lord, is a work of time and of infinite patience. He must disinter buried fragments, search among weeds, scrape away moss, and make the most of every scrap of cornice or moulding that lichen may have preserved or ivy held together. These trifles, indeed, are often his only guides in the reproduction of important details.

"Still by means of even this cursory glance, I have learned sufficient to be able to answer some of your lordship's questions, and to offer a few practical suggestions.

"1. In reply to your inquiry as to the probable cost of restoring Benhampton Castle in its integrity, I have to say that no building of that extent and style could possibly be restored throughout for less than £130,000 or £150,000.

"2. It is by no means necessary to restore the whole edifice. Your lordship might restore only such portions of it as would be suitable for the purposes of a modern residence.

"3. It is for yourself to limit the expense of restoration. If you will specify the sum you are disposed to devote to this work, it will then be in my power to lay before you an estimate of what may be done for that sum.

"4. I am of opinion that for an outlay of about £25,000 your lordship might repair the keep and restore three sides of the first quadrangle, including the banqueting hall ; and that such restorations might with great propriety be carried out in that more richly developed style of the period of Edward the Third which is known as the Decorated, or Early Perpendicular.

"5. That to leave the remaining quadrangles, the kitchen, outer walls, etc., etc., in their present condition would, I conceive, be no disfigurement to the place as a residence, but would, on the contrary, contribute largely to the beauty and picturesqueness of the whole.

"I have the honor to be, my lord,

"Yours respectfully,

"H. MORLEY DURRANT."

These letters were delivered to De Benham as he sat at breakfast on the morning of that eighth day. He read them both twice—the first time very quickly, the second time very slowly ; then folded them in silence and put them carefully into his pocket-book. His mother, observing his grave and troubled look, watched him anxiously, but said nothing. Presently he pushed his cup aside, and, muttering something about business in the City, snatched up his hat and went out.

But he did not go to the City. He turned his face westward, and, walking doggedly on and on for the greater part of an hour, never stopped till he came to the Regent's Park. Here, finding an unoccupied bench in a quiet corner somewhat away from the frequented paths, he sat down, leaned his elbows on his knees and his face upon his hands, and fell into a gloomy reverie.

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It was a brilliant morning toward the latter half of February, when the sunshine had already some warmth in it, and the air, though fresh, was not positively cold. And there was a pleasant look of spring about the grass and the budding trees, and even about the children and the nursemaids. But De Benham saw none of this. He scarcely felt the warmth of the sunshine. He scarcely heard the babble of the children on the broad walk a little distance off. His thoughts were dark and solitary, and all else seemed of the same complexion.

For these letters had hit him hard—especially that letter from his solicitors. He was almost bewildered by it, just at first. It upset all his calculations ; it disarranged all his plans ; it disappointed him bitterly. He had long since framed his own estimate of what this purchase would cost him. He knew the ordinary price of land in and about Benhampton ; and he knew that this particular soil was poor and profuse—that parts of it, in fact, were so stony and barren as to be little better than waste. In short, he had made up his mind that Farmer Bowstead's property might be bought in for about twenty-five pounds per acre. Fifteen thousand pounds—eighteen thousand—even twenty thousand, if need be, he was prepared to spend for it ; but thirty-six thousand—

It was more than half of all that he had earned. It was more than, in the present state of his affairs, he could as yet actually lay his hand upon and call his own. It was an immense sum. And for this immense sum what should he get ? A ruin, a stone-quarry, a few miserable cottages, and seven hundred and twenty acres of the worst land in the county.

A mere remnant, after all, of the Benhampton estates ; yet, remnant as it was, he must buy it. Even on these exorbitant terms, he must buy it. The old place was too precious, his vow was too sacred, to leave him any alternative. The opportunity would never come back again—never—never. He must buy it, cost what it might.

Then came other considerations. That he should be content to stop at this point was impossible. He might close with Matthew Bowstead's executors ; he might partially restore the castle ; but when all this was done, should he be content ? Other waifs and strays of the old domains would doubtless fall vacant from time to time. How should he feel if, when they did so fall vacant, he found himself without means to purchase them ?

And yet, unless his health and strength came back to him, unless he could again amass money, and go on amassing money, he must be utterly without those means. Nay, more—he must be without means, or income, or resources of any kind. He must be just a farmer, as Matthew Bowstead was a farmer, existing on the produce of this one poor farm. He must live a miserable, anomalous, contracted life—such a life as no man in his senses could seriously contemplate for a moment.

Well, there was yet another way. He might give up that cherished dream of restoration, build a modest residence in a corner of the ruins, invest the rest of his capital, and live the life of a quiet country gentleman. But of all the paths open to him, that was precisely the one path he disliked the most. Merely to possess the place

would be nothing, if he could not rebuild it. How should he endure to watch the work of ruin going on from year to year? Or how should he bear to patch, and prop, and trim, unable to do more than arrest the progress of decay?

Thus he pondered. Thus he questioned himself. Thus an hour—two hours—two hours and a half went by. And all this time, far down below the shifting current of his thoughts, there ran a conscious undercurrent of other thoughts, other questionings, other misgivings—an undercurrent swift, and silent, and steady, which was gradually carrying all before it.

"There is no other way," he said at last, having read his letters through again, for the fourth or fifth time. "There is no other way. It is my fate."

When Temple De Benham said these words (and whether he actually spoke them aloud, or only uttered them in the silence of his own soul, matters nothing), he had made up his mind that he would marry Claudia Hardwicke.

CHAPTER LVI.

MISS HARDWICKE'S OFFERS.

MISS HARDWICKE'S matrimonial chances had been neither few nor far between. She could not have counted them, indeed, upon the fingers of both hands. But then, she was not only very rich and very handsome, but she had reigned in her brother's house ever since her education was finished, and so, necessarily, had seen much society. If ever woman was certain to be bored with offers, that woman was Claudia Hardwicke. It had been going on now for seven years. She left Madame de Fleury's *pension* in the Faubourg St. Germain at eighteen, and that was just seven years ago. The curious in such matters may hence compute what was Miss Hardwicke's age in this year of grace, 1862.

During these seven years, then, her opportunities of marriage had been frequent; but those opportunities were not to her taste, and she had embraced none of them. A German banker, a fashionable physician lately knighted, a Q.C., a wealthy ship-builder, a younger son of a baronet, a City rector, a Scotch M.P., a Taxing Master in Chancery, and some three or four substantial merchants, had all striven for the prize in turn, and been rejected. Rumor began at last to whisper that Miss Hardwicke was too fastidious, and that she would die an old maid.

The lady, however, was fond of her own way; fond also, in her own way, of her brother Josiah; fond, above all else, of her liberty. From this last she was resolved never to part, unless—well, unless in exchange for something still more precious. Possibly for love; still more probably for position.

For with all her pride and all her coldness, Claudia Hardwicke had sometimes dreamed of love. The world believed her to be as inaccessible as her own marble portrait; but she was not of the world's opinion. She believed, on the contrary, that it was in her to love very profoundly; but then the man whom she could so love must be one whom she should be able to recognize for her master. He need be neither rich,

nor handsome, nor even amiable; but he must be of high birth and high courage, resolute, ambitious, a thorough man, and a thorough gentleman. Were such a one to invite her to become his wife, Miss Hardwicke told herself that she could love him with a very deep and enduring love; but then she also told herself that no such man would ever cross her path.

Putting love out of the question, however, Miss Hardwicke was accessible on the side of position. Great rank would at any time have been a sore temptation to her; but great rank had not fallen in her way. With all her offers, she had never yet had the chance of a title, save in the one instance of the fashionable physician, whose knighthood was, in her eyes, simply contemptible.

Hence it was all the more curious that the opportunity should at last present itself under a twofold aspect. In a word, that Claudia Hardwicke should, in the course of one and the same day, have two coronets at her feet.

De Benham, as we have seen, sat and pondered long before he came to his resolve; but having come to that resolve, he rose and went his way; for it was his nature to decide and do—to pass at once from meditation to action. "If 'twere well 'twere done," he was fond of quoting, "then 'twere well it were done quickly." And to-day, having told himself it should be done, he determined that it should, indeed, be done quickly. So he hurried home, dressed (not without some scorn of his own solicitude in the matter of gloves and cravat), and presented himself at Strathellan House at about three o'clock in the afternoon.

He found Miss Hardwicke at home and alone, in her hat and habit, having just come in from a late ride.

As soon as the first commonplaces had been exchanged, the conversation began to flag.

"Have you seen my brother this morning?" asked Miss Hardwicke, after a pause.

To which De Benham replied that he had not been down to Prior's Walk for more than a week. And then there was silence again.

Miss Hardwicke took off her gloves, laid her hat aside, trifled with her whip, and began to wonder when her visitor would go away.

Presently De Benham spoke again.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Hardwicke," he said, "for being so dull."

The lady smiled.

"I thought your silence quite brilliant," she replied.

"A man is silent either because he has nothing to say, or because he has too much. The latter is my case. I have a great deal to say, and I do not know where to begin."

Miss Hardwicke looked up with the very faintest gleam of surprise upon her face, but said nothing. De Benham, leaning forward, and looking into his hat as if the words were written there and he was reading them, went on in a grave, deliberative voice.

"My object in coming here to-day," he said, "may be stated in very few words. I come to tell you precisely what my position is—what my prospects are—and to ask if you will be my wife."

He paused; not as if for a reply, but as if weighing every word that he had yet to say.

As for Miss Hardwicke, she sat unmoved; absorbed apparently in the setting of her whip-handle. Perhaps a slight tinge of color may have come into her cheeks for one moment; but, if so, it was gone again directly.

"I am painfully sensible," De Benham continued, "of my own presumption. I know full well for how much I am asking; and I know how little I have to offer in return. These two things only—an honorable name and a handful of barren acres. No more, and no less. As for love, Miss Hardwicke, I have no right to name the word to you upon so short an acquaintance. I think you would be offended with me—and justly—if I did. Besides, although I am still quite young, adversity and anxiety have done much to age me. So much, that I doubt if I could now be what the world calls 'in love.' But—but I admire you; if I may be forgiven for saying what others have said to you so often. I admire you very much. I should be proud to call you my wife. And I think I should make you a good husband."

Having got thus far, he paused again.

"This is a compliment, Lord De Benham, for which I was not prepared," said Miss Hardwicke, feeling that she must at last say something.

"It is no compliment—at least, not in that sense. Whether it is any compliment to suppose, as I have supposed, that a woman who is young, beautiful, and wealthy, may be willing to sacrifice herself for an idea, is another matter."

"To sacrifice herself for an idea!" repeated Miss Hardwicke. "I do not understand you."

"I am anxious that you should understand me very exactly. Have you patience to listen to a long story?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then I will inflict my family history upon you."

And with this, De Benham proceeded to sketch, in as few words as he could, the rise and progress of his people from Geoffrey the Crusader to himself. He told how for long centuries the De Benhams had gone on heaping up riches and accumulating land; then how those riches had been squandered and those lands alienated; how his own father, heir to little more than a pile of ancestral mortgages, was finally ruined at college by an unprincipled associate; how he, Temple, brought up in ignorance of these facts, had struggled on through a youth of extreme poverty, obeying the natural bent of his genius, and dreaming only of music; how, since he came to know the truth, he had given up his whole soul to the one great end; how, in pursuit of that end, he had periled, and was ready again to peril, life and limb, health, home, and all that made life other than mere "labor and sorrow."

"And it is this toil, Miss Hardwicke," he said, "that I ask you to share. Most men could offer you a happier lot—would protest more—promise more—tell you (and I am sure, truly) that your riches did not weigh with them by the balance of a feather. I, on the contrary, begin by avowing that money is essential to my purpose; that it would be impossible for me to marry without money—and I ask you, quite honestly and plainly, whether you can make my ambition your ambition, my task your task. Whether, in a word, you can be content to devote your-

self to this unattractive work of raising up an ancient house from, as it were, the very dust of time—of rescuing an honorable name from, perhaps, total extinction, and of transmitting it to play its part for good or ill in the future history of the world."

"I do not think it an unattractive work," said Miss Hardwicke, somewhat slowly.

"I feared it must be unattractive to every one but myself."

"I do not see why."

"Well, because the motive, in the first place, is intensely personal. In the second place, because the world does not readily sympathize with the sterner passions—with pride, ambition, jealousy, revenge. Now it seems to me that of all the forms that either pride or ambition may take, family pride and family ambition are just those which provoke the promptest antagonism."

"It is true that we sympathize more heartily with misfortune."

"Ay; with the patient Ulysses, rather than the proud Achilles. But the all-important point now is, not whether I may command the world's sympathy, but if I may hope for yours."

Miss Hardwicke looked troubled.

"Lord De Benham," she said, "I scarcely know how to answer you. You must give me ten minutes for consideration."

"Ten days, Miss Hardwicke, if you please."

"No. If I considered any matter for ten days, I should never arrive at any conclusion. Ten minutes will be enough."

"Shall I go down into the library for that time?"

"If you will."

"And not come back till you send for me?"

"I will not send for you. I will go round the flower-garden, past the library windows, and you can join me."

De Benham rose, bowed, and turned away. At the door he hesitated and looked back. He felt as if he ought to say something more—something becoming in a suitor whose fate yet trembled in the balance. But, somehow, the words did not come easily.

"I hope," he said, "that you will try to—think favorably of my proposal."

And with this he left the room. As he crossed the hall, he saw, through the inner glass doors, a gentleman alighting from his horse. The gentleman flung his reins to a gardener, and De Benham recognized Lord Stockbridge. Glad to escape unseen, he then shut himself into the library, and, with most unloverlike composure, took a book from the shelves and a seat by the fire. The ten minutes, he knew, would now be expended most probably into thirty; but he could wait. He could wait with perfect patience; and he could read; and he could enjoy what he read. While his own mind yet wavered, he was restless enough; but now that he had placed his fate in Miss Hardwicke's hands he was agitated by no apprehensions, flattered by no hopes. He should know her decision soon enough in any case, and, whatever it might be, he would make the best of it.

So he sat by the library fire and read. The book was the second volume of Clough's "Plutarch," and the life at which he opened it was the life of Cato the Elder.

In the mean while Miss Hardwicke, instead of considering whether or not she should become

Lady De Benham, found herself called upon to receive Lord Stockbridge—Lord Stockbridge miraculously gloved, booted, and cravatted, with a camellia in his button-hole; somewhat red in the face, however, from much tightening about the waist. He had, as usual, plenty to say, chatting glibly about the weather, the foreign news, the winter opera, last night's debates, and the like. Miss Hardwicke answered in monosyllables, waiting till he should rise and take his leave.

He did rise presently—not to take his leave, but to change his seat. And the seat for which he changed it was the one that De Benham had just been occupying.

Miss Hardwicke knew directly what was coming. Perhaps she guessed it because that particular chair stood nearer the sofa on which she was sitting; perhaps the coincidence of place suggested the coincidence of purpose; but, at all events, she felt at once that Lord Stockbridge was then and there about to say the thing which she had known to be impending for a long time past.

And at the same instant she felt that she must, if possible, prevent him from carrying his design into effect.

"I am sorry to seem discourteous, Lord Stockbridge," she said, looking at her watch, "but I have an appointment; and, at this moment, a person waiting to see me."

"Let the person wait a few moments longer, my dear lady," he replied, with *empressment*. "I have half a dozen words to say to you which—which, egad! I've been screwing up my courage to say for so long, that if I don't do it now—"

"I think, as a rule, that things which need so much effort are best left unsaid," interposed Miss Hardwicke.

"Sometimes. Not always. Not in this instance. The truth is—I've had it on my mind ever since that Sunday when I brought Lady Chetwynd's card; and that—let me see—that is seven or eight months ago—"

"I am quite sure it is best left unsaid, Lord Stockbridge, whatever it may be," repeated Miss Hardwicke, with great earnestness.

"You do not, surely, forbid me to speak!"

"No; I entreat."

"But, egad!—"

"Nay, I know that it would be kind, and friendly, and—flattering. I am quite sure of that."

Lord Stockbridge looked down, frowning; and a dark flush came into his face.

"You do not give me credit, I presume, for—for loving you," he said, presently.

"I desire to retain your friendship, as I hope you will not reject mine."

"Friendship!" he repeated, very bitterly. "Pshaw! I ask for bread, and you give me a stone."

"But friendship is a precious stone—a diamond of purest water."

Lord Stockbridge got up with an air of impatience, and went over to the window.

"That's a mere *façon de parler*," he said, almost angrily. "I want *you*—you, Claudia—yourself. Not your friendship. You have been told, I suppose, that I'm a spendthrift— Well, I am. You have been told that I am nearly double your age— Well, perhaps I am. But what of this or of that? I have been a poor

man all my life—forced to live upon the future—had the education and tastes of a gentleman—what could I do, egad! but get into debt? But do you suppose that I got into debt because I liked it? Do you think I would have hampered myself with those confounded Jews if I could have helped it? No, no, Miss Hardwicke—not I. Then as to age—why, good Heavens! I'm in my prime—as bold a seat in the saddle, as steady a hand on a cue or a trigger, as you'll find between this and St. Petersburg!"

"Indeed, Lord Stockbridge—"

"No, no—pray let me speak. A man has a right to be heard, no matter how slender his chance may be. Unless, indeed, the lady is already promised to another; and that, I think, is not the case."

"No—I am still free."

"Then how can I help hoping? You are free, and I love you. Miss Hardwicke, I have no words to tell you how much I love you! There isn't a man living who'd do more to please you, if he had the chance. I'd go round the world for you. And as for money—well, I know, of course, that you have money; and you know that I have debts. But I don't know the extent of your fortune—neither, egad! do I know the extent of my debts! But I should wish to do all that was honorable, and—and liberal. Upon my soul, Miss Hardwicke, I can't believe that you mean to be obdurate."

"Obdurate is not the word, Lord Stockbridge. I do not love you, and I do not feel that I ever should love you. That is not obduracy. It is the simple truth—which, believe me, I would fain have avoided to put before you."

Lord Stockbridge bit his lip—took a turn across the room—came back to the charge.

"But there is another side to this question," he said. "Love is not the only consideration. Position is something. Rank is something. The Earldom of Stockbridge—"

Miss Hardwicke rose from her seat.

"No more, my lord," she said, with great dignity. "No more, I entreat. It becomes neither you to urge, nor me to listen. I can not accept your hand. It is impossible; but I thank you for the compliment you pay me, and I beg you to let all be as if this conversation had never taken place. I undertake to forget it, if you will do the same."

He shook his head.

"No," he said, gloomily. "I can't forget it—because I can't forget you."

And then he took up his hat.

"Perhaps, if I were to wait—to persevere—"

"No—it would be useless."

"Your decision is final?"

"My decision is final."

Lord Stockbridge stood for a moment, looking half angry, half mortified, as if uncertain upon what terms to part from her. Then, as if conquering himself, he said, with an effort: "Miss Hardwicke, you have my best wishes for your future happiness;" bowed low over her extended hand, touched it lightly with his lips, and left the room.

Miss Hardwicke went to the window, and, hidden by the curtain, watched her rejected suit-or mount and ride away.

Marry him! She felt she could not have married him if he had been a royal duke. And

yet—and yet, strange to say, there was a time, not long since, when she would have hesitated to refuse him. Nay, when she almost surely would not have refused him. But to-day—how was it that she had never observed that bloated, dissipated look—the lines about his eyes and mouth? Miss Hardwicke shuddered to think that if he had asked her a week or two before, she would most likely have accepted him. And then she put on her hat, gathered up the skirt of her habit, and went quickly down into the garden.

De Benham, about half-way through the "Life of Cato the Elder," saw her pass the window, restored the volume to its place, and went out.

"I am ashamed," she said, "to have left you alone so long. My visitor would not go."

"I was ready, and am still ready, to wait as long as you please," replied De Benham.

And having said this, he paused. He scarcely knew what to say next. It was like having to make his offer over again.

"I am almost afraid," he said, presently, "to ask my fate."

A something—an indefinable something which was neither tenderness, nor enthusiasm, but a sort of momentary elevation of expression—came into Miss Hardwicke's face.

"We will restore the glories of Benhampton," she said, looking at him.

De Benham took her hand, as Lord Stockbridge had taken it, and bowed over it, as Lord Stockbridge had bowed over it; but he bowed over it without kissing it.

After this, they walked for some time to and fro among the wintry paths and flowerless parterres, talking, not as lovers talk who have just plighted their faith to each other, but of the castle and land, of the proposed restorations, of Messrs. Balfour and Black, and of Mr. Morley Durrant.

When they parted, however, the diamond that had once been Senator Shirley's sparkled on the third finger of Miss Hardwicke's left hand. Did De Benham, as he placed it there, remember that other ring, to procure which he and Archie had walked into Monmouth one summer morning, not yet two years ago—the loving promises that went with that simple gift—the modest hopes of which it was the pledge—the sunny hours—the sweet idyllic time—the poetry and passion of first love?

CHAPTER LVII.

THE SOONER THE BETTER.

THE next few days went by in such a whirl of business, of visiting, of hand-shaking, congratulating, and letter-writing, that De Benham found no leisure to think of either the life he had left behind him, or the future that lay before him. But he had no desire now to think at all. He told himself that the time for reflection was past, and that the time for action was come. So, his road once chosen and lying straight before him, he pushed on with an eager and feverish haste that would have been natural enough in most men, but was all unlike that steady resolution with which he was wont to pursue his purposes. He hurried his lawyers in their negotiations about Benhampton; he

pressed the architect for his plans and estimates; he set on foot such proceedings as were needful to establish his claim to the peerage and enable him to take his seat in the House. Irritable, impatient, restless, he seemed to grudge every day, to be jealous of every hour, that stood between him and the fulfillment of his projects. It was as the conduct of a man who measures his strength against Time, and fears that Time will beat him.

One important point, however, was soon gained. He became master of Benhampton as soon as he made up his mind to pay the price required. He had heard much of the procrastination of the law; but in this instance there was no procrastination. He was surprised, indeed, to find how rapidly it was possible for an estate to change hands, and with how little formality Benhampton became his. Messrs. Balfour and Black tendered £35,000 on behalf of their client. Messrs. Clint and Wall, of Monmouth, accepted the same on behalf of the trustees, executors, and heirs of the late Matthew Bowstead. Mr. E. Black, Junior, went down to Monmouth with the money, and came back with the title-deeds; and the affair was concluded. It seemed to De Benham that he bought the old place as easily as he might have gone into a shop and bought a pair of gloves.

In the mean while, it was no small relief to find that the two persons most nearly connected with Miss Hardwicke and himself were favorable to the marriage. His mother had been agreeably surprised in the lady at their first interview; was not altogether insensible to the advantages of wealth; and so, on the whole, approved De Benham's choice. In a beautiful and dignified woman with £250,000 for her fortune, some inferiority of birth, she admitted, might be tolerated. Above all, her son would now run no more blockades, go hither and thither upon no man's errands, accept no man's pay. That De Benham should wash his hands clean of the contamination of trade, and live at home in health and ease, was more now to his mother than any other consideration upon earth. As for Mr. Hardwicke—conscious of his own share in the transaction, and secretly bubbling over with self-satisfaction—he was in the seventh heaven of gratified ambition.

"Claudia has been more to me than a sister," he said, when De Benham called upon him the next morning at Prior's Walk. "She has been a friend—a friend of whose abilities I have the highest opinion; for whose character I have the utmost respect. I am fully sensible of the honor of this alliance—proud, indeed, to be in my own person connected with so ancient and noble a house; but my sister is no ordinary woman, and if your lordship were Emperor of all the Russias, I should not deem Claudia Hardwicke unworthy of your hand."

"If I were Emperor of all the Russias, Mr. Hardwicke," replied De Benham, "I should consider myself singularly fortunate—as I do now."

Mr. Hardwicke bowed.

"I should never covet rank for myself," he said. "To know that my signature is respected from Prior's Walk to the remotest dependency of the British Empire, contents my ambition. But I confess I should have been disappointed if my sister had married a commoner."

"Nature ordained Miss Hardwicke to adorn a coronet," De Benham replied, with a somewhat forced politeness.

"Just so. And yours, my lord, is not the only coronet that might have been hers."

"Indeed! Then I am so much the more favored."

Mr. Hardwicke bowed again. He would fain have told De Benham that that other coronet was an earl's; but he magnanimously forebore.

"I hope Miss Hardwicke will consent to name an early day," said De Benham.

"I am no friend to long engagements," replied the merchant.

"We shall not differ, I think, in the matter of settlements," pursued De Benham. "The estate, of course, must be entailed; but I should gladly see a large proportion of your sister's fortune tied up for her own benefit and that of her younger children. At the same time, I am anxious to add as much as possible to the estate itself, which consists at present of little more than enough for a good-sized park."

"You would wish to invest the greater part of Claudia's money in land, to be inherited by her eldest son?"

"That is my meaning."

"Nothing could be more just, my lord; or more judicious."

"I only hope," said De Benham, "that Miss Hardwicke will consent to make my term of probation as short as possible."

"Still, you want some little time to become better acquainted."

"I do not think so. People never really know each other before marriage. Both Miss Hardwicke and myself are somewhat reserved in our dispositions, and I believe should be no better acquainted at the end of three years than at the end of three weeks."

Mr. Hardwicke smiled, but said nothing.

"I want you to intercede for me," said De Benham.

"Ah, no! That is a matter in which I dare not meddle. However, my lord, you must not be too impatient."

"I can not help being impatient," replied De Benham, gloomily.

"But ladies do not like to be hurried into matrimony. And, indeed, they are entitled to their fair share of courtship, for it is the pleasantest phase of a woman's life."

De Benham looked down, and gnawed his mustache in silence.

"Let me be frank with you, Mr. Hardwicke," he said. "It is not in me to write sonnets to my mistress's eyebrow. I am a prosaic suitor, and I don't feel that I shall make much way in Miss Hardwicke's affections until our lives and interests are one. Believe me, the sooner we marry the better and happier it will be for both. Besides, I—I am not very strong. I am overworked, and I suppose I am overanxious. If your sister would take compassion upon me, and put me out of suspense—"

"She has done that, I conceive, in accepting you," interposed Mr. Hardwicke.

"To some extent. But, in truth, I want change of air—of scene—of ideas."

"It seems to me that you have never given yourself time to get over that fever," said Mr.

Hardwicke. "And then, besides the fever, you were wounded."

"Oh, the wound was nothing! But, as you say, I have been too busy to take care of myself."

"Yet, the other day you would not admit that you were ill."

"I am not ill; I am only weak and exhausted. If, however, I could prevail upon Miss Hardwicke to put up with me at once, we might go abroad for the whole spring and summer, leaving the work-people in possession of Benhampton. It would be a good deed, Mr. Hardwicke; for I shall never get better while I stay in London."

"Represent your case to my sister in that light, my lord, and you can scarcely fail of success."

With this they shook hands, and parted.

That afternoon, Lady De Benham did a thing she had not done since the early years of her married life. She paid a visit. She dressed herself in her best black, sent to the nearest livery-stables for a brougham, and called upon Miss Hardwicke. Miss Hardwicke, surprised and touched by this unexpected courtesy on the part of one who, as she well knew, rarely crossed the threshold of her own house, went through the interview very gracefully; so that Lady De Benham, having kissed her on the brow and bade God bless her with some solemnity at parting, went home more than ever impressed in her favor.

"We must return the visit to-morrow, Claudia," said Mr. Hardwicke, when he came back, an hour or two later, from the City. "I will leave the office early, on purpose. And we must invite her to dinner on Friday or Saturday."

"She will not come," replied Miss Hardwicke.

"Not if we beg her to fix her own day, and offer to send the carriage for her?"

"We can beg her to fix her own day, but I am sure we must not offer to send the carriage."

"You mean it would look like a liberty."

"I mean that Lady De Benham is—Lady De Benham. You will understand the full force of that definition when you have seen her."

"Is he at all like her?"

"A little, perhaps; but not much."

"I asked him up to dine to-night, but he had an appointment with his architect at eight, and could not come. He is not one of those who let the grass grow under their feet, Claudia."

"I have yet to discover Lord De Benham's faults of character," said Miss Hardwicke, faintly smiling; "but I suppose want of energy is not one of them."

"He looks ill," observed her brother, after a pause. "I have told him so again and again, and he has always denied that he felt ill till to-day. He admits now that he wants rest and change of air."

Miss Hardwicke looked up, but said nothing.

"He wants you to marry him at once," continued the merchant.

"Indeed!" said Miss Hardwicke, coldly.

"He says, if you would consent to take him now, and go abroad for the spring and summer, he should get well. He can never gain strength in London."

And then, forgetting all about his determination not to meddle, Mr. Hardwicke set to work to plead De Benham's cause far more roundly

and energetically than De Benham would have ventured to plead it for himself.

"He has instructed you to say all this, I presume?" said she, presently.

"He—he begged me to intercede for him," Mr. Hardwicke admitted.

The lady smiled, somewhat disdainfully.

"You are an excellent advocate, Josiah," she said; "but you have forgotten to urge the strongest reason of all."

"What is that?"

"Money. Lord De Benham, you observe, dares not embark in any great outlay until he has command of my fortune. Nay, it is so, indeed. He told me himself that it was so. He has dealt with me candidly."

"Then, shall you consent?"

Miss Hardwicke paused before replying.

"I have accepted Lord De Benham," she said at length, speaking very slowly, "intending to make his aims my aims, and his interests my interests. Whatever I know to be essential to those aims and interests, I will do."

"Magnanimously said, my dear Claudia."

"But he must speak for himself."

"Oh, undoubtedly!"

And then, Mr. Hardwicke, with his pompous, old-fashioned air, but with much real feeling also, took his sister's hand, and said:

"I believe from my heart that he is worthy of you, Claudia. Business, you know, is not a bad test; and in the way of business I have tested this young man thoroughly. He is upright, punctual, scrupulously just, the very soul of honor."

"In one word—a gentleman."

"Just that. I do think, my dear sister, that he will make you happy."

Miss Hardwicke looked at him affectionately, but somewhat sadly.

"For how many years you have made my happiness your first care, Josiah!" she said. "But there is the dressing bell—we must get ready for dinner."

CHAPTER LVIII.

DE BENHAM MAKES HIS WILL.

It was done now—done, and past recall. For the first day or two after his engagement to Miss Hardwicke, De Benham felt as if he were walking in his sleep. In a few minutes, with a few words, he had achieved the purpose of his life. He had desired riches; and great riches were now to be his. He had vowed to buy back Benhampton; and Benhampton was already his. All that he had willed, he had done. All that he had touched had turned to gold. He was as a traveler who, before he dreams that half his work is done, finds himself on a sudden at the mountain-top with the landscape at his feet. He stands breathless. He can scarcely believe that there is not another height to scale. He is almost sorry that the peak is gained so soon, and the excitement already over.

So De Benham found himself all at once at the summit of his ambition—asked himself if it were not all a dream—sighed to think that the heat of the battle was over, and the victory won after so brief a struggle.

In the mean while, society pronounced him to be the happiest and most fortunate of men, and took every opportunity of telling him so. Of all those, however, upon whom the duty of congratulation devolved, there was not one, perhaps, who fulfilled that duty more heartily than Archibald Blyth. He was even more delighted than Mr. Hardwicke; but then he had his own most exquisite reasons for being so. He was charmed that his cousin should enrich his friend. He was equally charmed that his friend should ennoble his cousin. And he was pleased that De Benham and he should become connections through this marriage. But above all, he rejoiced in the fact of the marriage itself—in that which it would go to prove—in that which might result from it, when proved.

If De Benham, he argued, had indeed dismissed from his heart all that love which he once professed for Juliet Alleyne, was it not well that she should know it beyond doubt? Was it not well that the evidence should be as decisive as possible? That she still loved him, and lived upon the memory of that love, was only too certain; but would she permit herself to think of him, and so to dwell upon the past, if he were married to another? Would she not then feel that it was her duty to forget him? Would she not then set herself to root up those memories, and cast them out, no matter at what cost of tears and sorrow? And when she had done this—but not one hour sooner—might there not—(it was an anxious question, and one that Archie asked himself very often in these days)—might there not possibly come some faint dawning of hope for himself?

Waiting, and wondering, and hoping thus, it was no marvel that he hailed the news of De Benham's engagement with delight, and longed to hear the music of his marriage bells.

"It was the very match I made for you in my own mind, years ago," said he. "I used to think you'd be a celebrated composer, with perhaps a scrap of red ribbon in your button-hole; and that Claudia would fall in love with your fame, and you with her beauty. I remember telling you so, one day—but you didn't take kindly to the notion."

It was the afternoon of the first Sunday following the engagement, and De Benham had gone to tell the news to Archie in his lodgings in Great Ormond Street. De Benham, who complained of being tired, was lying on the sofa, making a very small cigarette last as long as possible—pretending to smoke, in fact. Archie, in dressing-gown and slippers, was sitting in front of the fire, puffing away vigorously at the Turk's head pipe.

"You said you'd as soon marry Lady Macbeth or the Minerva Medici," he added, finding that De Benham made no reply.

"Then I hope you rebuked me as I deserved for speaking so of a lady who is your cousin."

"Ah—I suppose I had no business to remind you of it, now that she is to be your wife. But, you see, I don't quite realize it yet—it's all so new and wonderful. However, I ought to be getting used to surprises by this time."

"I hope your surprises have been pleasant ones," said De Benham.

"Why, yes—for the most part. It was an uncommonly pleasant surprise the other day,

when old Josiah handed me that check for five hundred pounds; just after he had raised my salary, too. And as for your news just now, it is pleasanter still. I can't tell you how glad I am. But your turning out to be a lord was the greatest surprise of all. I've not got over that yet."

"But there is nothing for you to get over, Archie," said De Benham, smiling. "I shall never be a lord to you."

Archie shook his head.

"You can't help it," he replied.

"I can help it, if you can. We are friends, comrades, brothers. We have shared too many perils and too many pleasures to let a mere word stand between us now. What difference can it make to you whether I am a lord or a commoner?"

Again Archie shook his head.

"It makes a great difference to you," he said, "and therefore it can not but make a difference to me. Here are you, a nobleman—soon a very rich nobleman—living in a big castle—keeping lots of servants—visiting heaps of fine people—as much a petty sovereign as that Grand Duke of yours over in Germany. Here am I—a clerk in a merchant's office—a frequenter of omnibus-roads, river-steamers, and half-price plays—a fellow who never had twenty pounds to spare in his life till a few days ago, and is now rich with five hundred. How can you and I be equal any longer?"

De Benham threw away his cigarette, and sat up.

"That is all quite true, for the world in general," he said. "But it must not be true for you and me. You are my only friend, and I don't mean to let you go. Besides, are you not to be my cousin?"

"That fact won't go far toward the leveling of social distinctions," said Archie, comically. "The deuce a bit of equality have I ever got out of cousinship with the Hardwickses."

"I should like to see you married and happy, Archie," said De Benham, suddenly.

"Married?"

"Ay—if you could find a girl to your liking. But I have never known you fancy any one, except Janet Ashby."

Archie felt very guilty and embarrassed.

"Janet Ashby's as nice as possible," he said; "but I've never thought of her since. Besides, I don't mean to marry till I can afford a good home. Love in lodgings, with the quarter's allowance always running short, and a bone of cold mutton in the cupboard, is not the sort of thing I prefer."

"You must be better off, no doubt; and have some little capital to start with. What are you going to do with your five hundred pounds?"

"Put it in the bank, of course."

"Will you lend it to me instead?"

Archie jumped up; unlocked an old-fashioned bureau in which he kept all sorts of treasures, letters, pipes, tobacco, stationery, bills, and so forth, and brought out a little bundle of crisp, clean, Bank of England notes.

"There!" he said, smoothing them out upon the table. "There they are—ten fifties. I haven't touched a penny of them."

De Benham put them in his pocket-book.

"I shall invest this money for you in my share

of the *Stormy Petrel*," he said; "and I hope, double it twice over."

"I hoped you wanted it for yourself—for the work at Benhampton!" exclaimed Archie, reproachfully.

"It amounts to the same thing. I shall have five hundred more for Benhampton, if I have five hundred less for speculation."

"But suppose the *Stormy Petrel* comes to grief again?"

"You shall not be a loser. I made certain you would let me have the money, and that I should be able to quadruple it; so I brought this receipt, ready filled in, for two thousand—thus insuring you against loss if any thing happens to the ship or to me."

"I can't take it," said Archie, flushing crimson. "You're as generous as a prince, Lord De Benham; but, indeed, I can not take it."

"For Heaven's sake! old friend, don't call me by that name, or I shall think I have offended you."

Archie protested that he was not offended; that he was, on the contrary, obliged and grateful; but that he would by no means accept an acknowledgment for fifteen hundred pounds in excess of the sum lawfully his own.

De Benham looked pained.

"Ah, well!" he said, wearily, "then I must find some other way."

And he rose to go.

"When is the wedding to come off?" asked Archie, following De Benham down the stairs.

"Very soon, I hope. Perhaps, some time next month. You will be my best man, old fellow?"

"Of course, if you wish it," replied Archie.

And so they shook hands, and parted, and the door closed between them.

Then De Benham stood still for a moment, and sighed, and pressed his hand to his side, as if in pain. He had seen Archie very seldom of late—not oftener than once or twice since the dinner-party at Strathellan House—and if there was any difference in his friend's manner toward himself on those occasions, he had been too much occupied to observe it. But to-day he saw the difference, and felt it keenly. He felt that an invisible barrier had risen up between Archie and himself. He felt that they shook hands, as it were, across a gulf; and that the old, pleasant freedom of their intercourse was gone. But why should it be gone? And whence this sense of restraint? He was not conscious of having done, or said, any thing to estrange his friend. He knew of nothing but the inequality of their rank which could in any way account for the change.

And then he told himself, very bitterly, that this friendship which he had so prized, which he had thought to hold fast by, and take comfort in, all his life, must go with the rest. It was a part of the price he had to pay. And what a heavy price it was! First his art, then his love, then his freedom, now his friend. What more had he to resign—except his life?

Thinking thus, and walking very slowly, De Benham found himself at the corner of Queen Square, face to face with the captain of the *Stormy Petrel*, then on his way to bid Archie good-by, and on the point of starting next day for Liverpool.

"I was intending to call upon you, my lord,

to-morrow morning," he said. And then, like the rest, he began to offer his congratulations.

But De Benham was in no mood to be congratulated.

"I would fain have taken another trip with you first," he said. "I would fain once more have felt my foot on the deck and the spray in my face, as the *Stormy Petrel* dashed over Charleston Bar."

The Cornishman smiled.

"You'll be better off, I'm thinking," he replied, "in your seat in the House of Lords."

"I shall often remember you, Captain Hay, wherever I may be."

"Remember us, my lord, when your wedding bells are ringing; and fancy that maybe we are running away at that very moment, with the Yankees at our heels. Good-by. I wish you joy—you and your beautiful bride."

"And I wish you all prosperity and good fortune."

So they parted—never, as it happened, to meet again. Captain Frank Hay dropped down the Mersey next day with the *Stormy Petrel*, accompanied by a new supercargo in the person of Onesiphorus Knott, a nephew of the trusty Timothy. From Liverpool they steamed straight for the Bahamas, taking Nassau, as before, for their point of departure. The blockade of Charleston Harbor had now, however, become so stringent that, having achieved one successful run, the captain of the *Stormy Petrel* found it expedient to shift his head-quarters to St. George's, Bermuda, and make Wilmington the scene of his subsequent operations. This he continued to do for a period of sixteen months, during which he carried his little vessel nine times triumphantly in and out of Wilmington; so running the blockade of that port no less than eighteen times. On the tenth occasion, however, his good luck deserted him. He left St. George's on the 24th of July, 1863, and having made all the way from the Bermudas to the mouth of Cape Fear River in safety, was at the last moment caught sight of and hotly pursued by two Federal steamers. In this strait, the pilot in charge of the *Stormy Petrel* made a desperate dash for a certain channel between two of the sand islets scattered about this part of the coast, shaved the shore too closely, and ran the boat aground. The American commanders then took possession, and the *Stormy Petrel* became once again a prize. But this time no recapture was possible. The Northerners remembered the famous story too well for that, and took care to keep what they had caught. Carried into New York Harbor, the *Stormy Petrel* was there confiscated, refitted, mounted with a couple of heavy guns, converted into a blockader, and sent to join the squadron off Charleston. Being continued in this service at various points along the coast till the close of the war, the little craft was then sold off, together with a number of other government vessels, and became the property of a Boston firm. She was then reconverted into a trader, dispatched to the coast of California for the sale of an assorted cargo and the purchase of hides, and is at this present time (1869) cruising, under the name of the *Pottawatomy*, between Santa Barbara and San Francisco.

As for Captain Frank Hay and his crew, they underwent the semblance of a trial at New York,

and obtained their liberty within a few days. The men, confident of high wages and immediate service, went straight to Nassau, which post continued to the last to be the main rendezvous for blockade-runners. But their captain had saved money, and was tired of the work. He resolved to give himself a few months' holiday ashore, and started upon a tour of the Northern States. In the course of this tour he caught a severe cold, and died quite suddenly from inflammation of the lungs at a little village within hearing of the Falls of Niagara. So ended a brave man and a skillful sailor. It is due to his memory to add that the *Stormy Petrel*, while in his hands, proved a gold mine to her owners. De Benham, a partner now in speculation, staked several thousands, and in course of those sixteen months doubled his venture ten times over. Archie's modest *peculium* being slipped in with the rest, increased and multiplied according to the same ratio. As for Mr. Hardwicke's gains, they were whispered of in Prior's Walk as having amounted to something fabulous; but upon this point the merchant chose to keep his own counsel: and for once, not even Mr. Timothy Knott was allowed to be wiser than his fellows.

The strict sequence of events has been departed from in the narration of these facts; but, being narrated, they are now dismissed, and these pages will know the *Stormy Petrel* no more.

In the mean while De Benham went home, thinking of Archie, and trying, as he had said he would, to find "some other way." He dined that day with his mother; spent an hour of the evening at Strathellan House; and afterward sat late into the night, drawing up a rough draft of his will. Till now, he had never thought to make a will. He had been content that Lady De Benham should inherit all he had to leave, in case he died unmarried. But his thoughts had been gloomy of late, and there was a strange yearning at his heart to be helpful toward Archie, and to show remembrance to some two or three whom he had known and liked in the old college days at Zollenstrasse.

There were Franz Kielmann and his maiden—simple, kindly pair; passing rich with a Kapellmeistership of some thirty pounds a year. There was one Reichardt, a wild, fiery lad—a student of painting—whose passionate dream was Italy, and whom De Benham remembered as a free scholar, poorer even than himself. Above all, there was Archie—Archie who had borne with him in all his moods; nursed him in sickness; rejoiced with him in health. And then there was Juliet Alleyne—A pang of remorse wrung his heart when he thought of her. For the first time, he asked himself if she had suffered—if she had forgiven him—if she was happy? And then, remembering how unlikely it was that Mr. Alleyne should deny himself any indulgence for her sake, De Benham added her name to the list, and told himself that it was at least his duty to protect her against poverty. Ay, against poverty. That was all he could now do for the woman he had once so dearly loved.

Once! Was it indeed but once? Was that love really dead, and buried, and gone forever? Or was it dead and buried only as the grain found in Egyptian pyramids, which, being restored to the sweet influences of the living earth, germin-

ates, and blossoms, and bears fruit after three thousand years of sepulture?

This was a terrible question. A terrible question to rise up before him like a ghost, now that his hand and honor were pledged, and his life given away! De Benham, sitting alone in the silence of night, with one small reading-lamp casting a circle of vivid light on the papers before him, and the fire burning low, and all the room in shadow, saw before his mind's eye a sudden picture of his life as it might have been—peaceful, contented, obscure, "full of love, and the happy faces of children." But he saw it too late—too late!

And then there came upon him a heavy sense of loss and desolation—a strange spasm of self-mistrust—a feeling as if that which he had achieved at the cost of so much sacrifice was all in vain—

He moaned aloud. He covered his face with his hands. For the first time in many years, he wept. One by one, the bitter tears trickled out between his fingers and blotted the page on which her name was written. But presently the strong will reasserted itself. He sat up, brushed his hand across his eyes, and went on writing.

While he was doing these things, however—thinking of and for others with that strange, impersonal kind of tenderness that belongs to the act of giving for the last time—there was one anxious heart whose only thought was for him; one loving ear waiting for his footstep on the stairs, counting the quarters and half hours as they dragged by. How could his mother rest, if he were not resting also?

Still De Benham wrote on, little dreaming of the shadow that crept down more than once to crouch against his door and listen to the rapid traveling of his pen—little dreaming of the wakeful, faithful love that was about him "in the dead waste and middle of the night."

CHAPTER LIX.

SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS.

THE *Morning Post* (unapproachable for the nice discretion of its prophetic paragraphs) began with vague hints, ventured by degrees upon more definite auguries, and ended by announcing in due stereotyped phrase that "the marriage of Lord De Benham with Miss Hardwicke, youngest and only surviving daughter of the late Nehemiah Hardwicke, Esq., of Hardwicke Hall, Kent, and Strathellan House, Regent's Park, and niece of the late Alderman Sir Thomas Hardwicke, Knight, of Beechfield House, Hertfordshire, and Bucklersbury, London, was arranged to take place at St. Marylebone parish church on the 25th of next month"—next month being the month of April, 1862, and the paragraph making its appearance in the columns of the *Morning Post* about the end of the third week in March. Most of the daily papers copied the announcement, and all the weeklies; some with allusions to the affair of the *Stormy Petrel*; others with an account, more or less detailed, of the noble and ancient family of the De Benhams; nearly all with some kind of reference to the beauty and wealth of the bride.

For several days after this Archie staid away from Kensington, dreading lest he should be

questioned as to the truth of the announcement; dreading, above all, the look that he feared he should see in Miss Alleyne's eyes. When at length he could endure to absent himself no longer, he went up late one afternoon; knocked at the door just as it was beginning to get dusk; and, contrary to custom, but greatly to his relief for the moment, was ushered into the painting-room. Here he found Mr. and Miss Alleyne and two fashionable-looking men, evidently strangers—Mr. Alleyne talking; the strangers listening; Miss Alleyne standing by, arranging the drawings in a port-folio.

Archie saw at the first glance that there was an unusual look about the room. There were no color-tubes lying about; no bits of smeared rag; no cigar ends; none of the ordinary mess and litter of the studio. And there was no smell of turpentine. But there were three easels standing in the best light, side by side, and on each easel there was a picture.

Miss Alleyne looked up as Archie came in, gave him her hand, and said:

"You are just in time, Mr. Blyth. The pictures go to-morrow."

But Archie had heard nothing about the pictures.

"Where are they going?" he asked. "What pictures are they?"

"Oh, didn't you know?—three pictures that papa has just finished for the Marquis of Sandilands. They are to be exhibited, and must be sent in to-morrow."

And Miss Alleyne, when she had said this, went on sorting the sketches in the port-folio. From the way in which she spoke, and looked, and bent over the drawings—from the very way in which she averted her eyes before she had done speaking to him—Archie felt sure that she knew it. In the mean while, Mr. Alleyne recognized him by a nod, and went on discoursing.

"Only an artist," he was saying, "can appreciate the difficulty of treating these subjects. I could not make even Lord Sandilands understand why Kameshill, which is one of the most picturesque old houses in England, should need so much management. He would have had me take it full front, with all those windows and terraces, and that immense line of ornamented parapet showing against the sky. 'There, Mr. Alleyne,' he said, 'the house is a picture. You have only to paint it as you see it.' I replied that I must treat the subject in my own way. 'I have heard, my lord,' I said, 'of an artist who painted a profile portrait of a Polynesian chief, and was hung for treasonably depicting royalty with only half a face. Now, although I apprehend no such summary vengeance at your lordship's hand, I prefer to tell you beforehand that I must take Kameshill at an angle, and throw those endless parallels into perspective, or not take it at all.'"

"By Jove, now, that wasn't bad!" said one of the strangers—a tall, gentlemanly-looking man, with mustaches some nine inches in length. "I should like to have seen Sandilands's face when you compared him to the South Sea Islander."

"But I thought he knew so much about pictures, and statues, and all those things," remarked the other—a red-headed young man with

a glass in his eye. "The house in Park Lane is full of them."

"It is one thing, Sir Reginald, to judge of a picture when it is painted, and another to tell beforehand how it ought to be painted," said Mr. Alleyne.

"Ah! no doubt. For instance, I know whether a coat fits or don't fit—no one better; but I'll be hanged if I could tell you how to cut it out."

"That great and good man, George the Fourth, would have beaten you there, then, my dear fellow," said the gentleman who had spoken first; "for he used to cut out his own august coats with his own royal hands. He was a great friend of the late marquis, Mr. Alleyne. I remember they used to show a suite of rooms at Kameshill, called the Prince Regent's apartments."

"They are called so still," replied Mr. Alleyne. "And there is a delightful room, overlooking the Italian Garden, that used to be Sheridan's room. I had it all the time I was down there last autumn."

Then, turning to Archie, he said:

"So I hear, Mr. Blyth, that your friend Lord De Benham is to marry Miss Hardwicke."

It had come now, with a vengeance. Archie colored crimson.

"Ah! you saw that in the *Morning Post*," he said, confusedly.

"And in a dozen other papers. I suppose it is true?"

"Well—yes; I suppose so."

His ears tingled as he spoke. He did not dare to look at Miss Alleyne. In the mean while, the two strangers, hearing him addressed as a friend of De Benham, were observing him with some curiosity; and this added to his confusion.

"I am glad of it," said Mr. Alleyne. "He ought to be a very happy man. He gets both beauty and fortune. Miss Hardwicke, I think, is your cousin, Mr. Blyth?"

"A sort of cousin," said Archie, hesitatingly, "once or twice removed."

He would have been glad just at that moment to deny the relationship altogether, if with truth he could have done so.

"I certainly never saw so handsome a woman," continued Mr. Alleyne. "If I were twenty years younger, I should inevitably break my heart for her."

And now the visitors went away, conducted by Mr. Alleyne, who took them into the dining-room *en passant* to see a genuine Constable that he had just picked up in some obscure part of the town; for Mr. Alleyne loved to buy a good picture now and then, and had some of which he was justly proud—an undoubted Sir Joshua, and a Roman bit by Wilson, among the rest.

"We have had people coming and going in this way all yesterday and to-day," said Miss Alleyne, when they had left the room. "And they are all so stupid, and they all say the same things. It is weary work!"

"So I should think," said Archie. And there he stopped. He could not have started a fresh topic to save his life; yet he would have given any thing to be able to go on talking.

Miss Alleyne closed the folio abruptly, and went and stood by the stove; for the studio was warmed by a German stove up in the darkest

corner—a square, white-tiled stove, with a long black chimney going out through the wall. Miss Alleyne, as she bent over the fire, stood with her back to Archie and to the pictures.

"Mr. Blyth," she said presently, and the voice in which she spoke was very low—as low as a whisper—but quite clear and steady; "why did you not tell me?"

"How could I?" said Archie. "How could I give you that pain?"

"Pain!" she repeated, quickly. "But when there is pain to be borne, is it not better that one should bear it at once, and get it over?"

To this Archie, not feeling sure that the pain would have been so readily got over, said nothing.

"How long have you known it?" she said next.

"Not many weeks."

"How many weeks?—Three—four—six?"

"About five or six."

"And they are to be married in a month—in less than a month. How strange it seems!"

Again Archie was silent; partly because he perceived that she was speaking more to herself than to him; partly, also, from a vague consciousness that the less he said the better it might be.

When she next spoke, it was again to ask a question; and this time her voice wavered a little.

"Do you think she will make him—happy?"

"I—upon my word, I can't tell," said Archie.

"I shouldn't think so. She would not make me happy, I know."

"But if she loves him—"

Archie shrugged his shoulders.

"And if he loves her—"

"I don't believe he cares for her one bit," said Archie, bluntly; "nor she for him."

Miss Alleyne turned suddenly, with a look almost of terror in her face. "Oh no, Mr. Blyth," she exclaimed, "you do not mean that! It is impossible."

"I do mean it. It is just a marriage of convenience—he buys money, and she buys rank. So far as I can see, there is not even a pretense of love on either side."

Miss Alleyne sat down, and covered her face with her hands.

"How horrible!" she said, shuddering.

"People do it every day."

"But what people? Not such as—as—"

Archie bit his lip, not to say the bitter thing that came first.

"Not people who are true and faithful," he replied. "Not such as yourself, Miss Alleyne."

"True and faithful," she repeated, with a heavy sigh. "It seems to me that I shall never believe in truth or fidelity again."

"Don't say that, Miss Alleyne—pray don't say that! There is one at least who would be true—forever—no matter what happened—who loves you a thousand times better than De Benham ever loved you—There! I know I ought not to have said it. I know it's of no use—I've gone and made an ass of myself, and now you'll tell me not to come to the house any more, and I shall be the most miserable dog in London."

"Oh, Mr. Blyth! I am so sorry."

It was all she said; but in her face there was surprise and compassion, and in her voice infinite sweetness.

"Are you sorry? Then don't send me away."

At this moment Mr. Alleyne came back, pleased and smiling.

"Two very agreeable, gentlemanly fellows, those," he said; "Colonel Bamfylde and Sir Reginald Galbraith—acquaintances of Lord Sandilands. They have invited me to dine with them to-morrow evening at the Erectheum. That Sir Reginald is a young man of fine position and still finer prospects—a baronet; owner of large estates up in the North; and heir-presumptive to his cousin, the Earl of Invercairn. His mother, if I remember rightly, was a Carnegie. He has the Carnegie eyes and hair. I have no other engagement for to-morrow—have I, Juliet? None, certainly, of any importance, or I should have remembered it."

"You had asked Mr. Prosser and his brother for the evening," replied Miss Alleyne.

"Mr. Prosser and his brother? Ah, well—you can write a line to put them off. By-the-way, I promised to lend that young Prosser my Prout's 'Light and Shadow.' You can send it round with the note. And now, my love, as I presume we have done with visitors for to-day, I hope you are going to give us some tea."

But Archie grasped his hat, and declared that he must go.

"What, so soon? Well, I fear the tea has been in the drawing-room since four, and is no longer worth pressing upon you. Will you dine with us on Sunday, *jeune homme*?"

Poor Archie! it was the first time Mr. Alleyne had ever invited him to dinner; and the invitation, as he well knew, indicated a high degree of favor. He would have given his ears to accept it. He hesitated. He stole a furtive glance at Miss Alleyne, who had gone back to the folio, and was tying it up, busily. Then, sorely tempted though he was, he declined.

"I—I'm afraid I mustn't next Sunday," he said. "I am very sorry. I should like it above every thing."

And again he glanced at Miss Alleyne. The least look or smile of welcome would have been enough; but neither look nor smile were forthcoming. So he went away disconsolate.

"I wish you were not in such haste," said Mr. Alleyne, accompanying him to the door. "I wanted you to tell me all about this wedding—is it true that the lady has two hundred thousand pounds?"

"Oh, more—ever so much more," replied Archie, half-way down the steps.

"*Que diable!* What a matrimonial prize—a woman who is as rich as if she was ugly, and as beautiful as if she was poor!"

But Archie was already out of hearing; so Mr. Alleyne, who hated his good things to be lost, went back and repeated the epigram for his daughter's benefit.

Ah, me! how hard it is sometimes to listen, and smile, and stay the wandering thoughts! Mr. Alleyne little guessed with how heavy a heart his pretty Juliet praised that sorry jest.

In the mean while, Archie turned away from the house, cursing his unlucky stars, and despairing over the folly he had committed. What demon prompted him to speak at such a moment? Never, surely, since he had gone backward and forward to the house, could he have fallen upon a more evil hour for his declaration. Had he

not been telling himself all along that his only chance—if indeed he had any chance at all—must be far, far distant, when De Benham's marriage was over, and things had fallen back into their accustomed grooves? Had he not resolved within himself to wait and serve in silence, earning her friendship, deserving her trust, surrounding her with small observances, and betraying himself by no word or look till the time came when he felt that he might speak out the love that was in him? And now—fool that he was!—had he not thrown his chance away, perhaps forever?

He would have patronized the roof of an omnibus most nights, and gone back to town *sub Jove*, blissfully smoking his cigar; but he was in no mood just now for those cheap metropolitan joys. So he set off walking fast and furiously, not without a strong inclination to knock his head against every wall he came to, and chewed the bitter cud of his reflections by the way.

Striding eastward, and, like a born Londoner, instinctively taking the most direct road, he went through Kensington Gardens, struck across the Park to Grosvenor Gate, and followed the line of Grosvenor Street, intending to enter Regent Street by Maddox Street, and so steer his way home through Oxford Street, Great Russell Street, and Southampton Row. By the time he had crossed the Park and got to Grosvenor Gate, the lamp-lighters were going their rounds, and it was getting rapidly dusk. In Grosvenor Street he slackened his pace a little, having walked off some of his impatience; and as he crossed Bond Street into Lower Maddox Street, going up toward St. George's, Hanover Square, there came upon him agreeable reminiscences of a certain smoking mixture which he remembered to have bought once upon a time over the counter of a gloomy little tobacconist's shop in an equally gloomy little side street called Mill Street, which runs down at an angle at the back of the church and opens into Conduit Street just against that corner shop where dwelt whilom one Rodwell, beloved of book-fanciers. Following the bent of his reminiscence Archie then turned aside, sought and found the shop, and requested the Israelitish damsel in attendance to provide him with half a pound of the mixture aforesaid. This transaction effected, he purchased also a cigar, and lit it by the aid of a little gas-jet in a glass shade placed especially for that purpose at the door of the shop.

Now it happened that the shop was ill-lighted, and the street at this point narrow and dark, so that the daylight having quite faded from above, this little gas-jet cast quite a friendly gleam across the pavement. Standing beside the gleam, though not in the path of it, Archie, having lit his cigar and put his half pound of mixture in his pocket, then waited for a few moments at the door, looking out absently, and thinking still of the unlucky thing that he had done.

Presently a Hansom cab came rattling at full speed round by the church, and drew up at the entrance of Mill Street, about eight houses from the tobacconist's. From this cab a gentleman alighted somewhat slowly and feebly, examined the contents of his purse under the street-lamp at the corner, and paid the driver. It was now so dark and his thoughts were so busy elsewhere,

that until his attention was arrested by something familiar in the gentleman's appearance and something odd in his manner of proceeding, Archie saw, but saw without observing, this commonest of street incidents.

The gentleman, it has been said, alighted and dismissed his cab. He then, however, stood still for some seconds, looking anxiously back in the direction by which he had come, and up Maddox Street toward Regent Street to the left, and down Mill Street toward Conduit Street straight ahead—like a man anxious to escape observation, and to make certain that he is not being followed. This done, he came down Mill Street, stooping somewhat in his gait, and passed the tobacconist's door so closely that if Archie had not involuntarily drawn back their coats would have almost brushed together as he went by.

At that moment the light of the gas-jet fell full upon him, and Archie recognized De Benham.

First surprise, then blank wonder, kept Archie for the moment from darting out upon his friend and hailing him, as at any other time he would have done. He waited—looked after him—watched him to the corner of Conduit Street, and there saw him pause again, and again look cautiously round in every direction as before. Then, having satisfied himself, apparently, that he was not being tracked, he crossed over, following the continuation of Mill Street on the other side of the road. But before he was half-way across Conduit Street, Archie was at his heels.

CHAPTER LX.

AN INVALID'S WHIM.

THE continuation of Mill Street after crossing Conduit Street inclines a little to the right, narrows presently into an alley for foot-passengers, and ends in a covered way opening upon the north end of Saville Row. It is just one of those odd, grimy little nooks and corners which are the delight of curiosity-hunters and lovers of book-stall literature, no less than of business men, telegraphic messengers, and the rest of that hurried class which is always in search of a short cut. It was down this alley and through this covered passage that Archie followed Temple De Benham into Saville Row.

Where could he be going at this hour, in the dark, with so much precaution? Why all this care not to be seen? Why all this mystery? It is to be feared that Archie, when he started in pursuit of his friend's footsteps, never stopped to ask himself whether, if mystery there were, he had any right to attempt to search out the heart of it.

Meanwhile De Benham crossed the turning to New Burlington Street and went down the east side of Saville Row. Archie followed, on the opposite pavement. About half-way down, De Benham suddenly stopped and looked round. Archie, on the watch for some such movement, fell back into the shelter of a doorway, and waited as if to be let in. Then De Benham quickened his pace; hurried on a few yards farther; knocked at the door of a house that seemed rather larger than most of its neighbors; and was immediately admitted.

It was a gloomy-looking house, showing no

gleam of light from any of its numerous windows. Archie crossed over and examined it. There was a brass plate upon the door, and a brass number. He could just distinguish the number; but there was no street-lamp near, and the night was now so dark that he found it impossible to make out the name upon the plate. He even took off his glove and tried to feel out the letters, but in vain. Just then, a policeman came by and looked at him suspiciously. At the same moment he heard a sound of footsteps and voices within; so he darted down the steps with as much alacrity as if he had been contemplating a burglary. He then went as far as the entrance to the Albany, and there waited for a quarter of an hour or more, watching the house, and wondering how soon De Benham would come out. Soon it began to rain heavily; whereupon Archie abandoned his post, turned off into Vigo Street, and took refuge in a decent-looking little coffee-shop, where he called for half a pint of coffee and the Post-office London Directory.

He soon found what he sought—the street, the number, and the name. . . And the name was familiar to him, for it was that of a famous surgeon, a baronet, an author, a man of European reputation; one of the shining lights of the scientific world—Sir Bartholomew Baxter.

So now the mystery was explained, and Archie, as he sipped his coffee, wondered that he had not guessed it from the first. Was not Saville Row peopled with healers of men? and was not De Benham, despite his asseveration to the contrary, not only in bad health, but, as it should seem, in just that stage of bad health when, without apparently having anything definite the matter with him, a man seems daily to take less and less hold upon life? That he should visit his doctor by stealth was of one piece, after all, with his obstinacy in refusing to admit that he was ailing. The incomprehensible thing, however, was that any sensible man should feel ashamed of being ill. For if he was not ashamed of it, what other motive could he have in denying it? Was he unwilling to alarm his mother? If so, he might be quite sure that his looks had already alarmed that tender heart quite sufficiently. Or was it that, being on the eve of marriage, he feared lest any confession of illness on his part might give cause for delay?

Well, be all this as it might, it was some satisfaction to know that De Benham was taking care of himself at last, and that he had placed himself in such good hands as those of Sir Bartholomew Baxter.

Having settled these questions with himself, Archie dismissed the subject from his mind; and but for something that happened about a week later, would almost have forgotten it.

Now, all the world knows that the renowned Mr. Poole, who lights up so beautifully on the evening of every ninth of November, and who is justly proud of the privilege of making coats and other garments for a certain High and Puissant and deservedly popular Personage, hath his shop—or, more politely, his place of business—in Saville Row. Those who do not know this fact—who are not penetrated, so to speak, with the fame and praise of Poole and his "so-potent art"—are simply barbarians, anthropophagi, dwellers in Cimmerian darkness. Not so Archibald Blyth. He had long since worshiped from

as far off. He had long since cherished a fond but hopeless ambition. That ambition he now resolved for once to gratify.

He would have a suit from Poole, to wear at De Benham's wedding.

The occasion justified the deed. Never again, most surely, would it be Archie's destiny to act as best man to a lord.

So he repaired again to Saville Row about a week after the date of his evening adventure; and this time he went very early in the morning, between eight and nine o'clock, going all that distance out of his way before business hours in the City. Mr. Poole's aristocratic *employés* were themselves only just arriving, and doubtless took it somewhat ill that any customer should intrude upon them at that unwonted season. Archie, however, gave his order; was measured; and came forth rejoicing; and lo! as he emerged once more upon the street, he found himself face to face with Temple De Benham.

"What!—Archie?" said De Benham, evidently disconcerted. "Who would have dreamed of meeting you here—and at this hour of the morning!"

"Is that so wonderful? Well now, the last time I met you here, it was in the evening; and you were going into Sir Bartholomew Baxter's." De Benham changed color.

"What do you mean?" he said, angrily. "What business—"

And having got so far, he checked himself in some confusion.

But Archie, remembering that he had to do with a sick man, already regretted the retort.

"What business is it of mine?" he said, gently. "Well, it is so far my business that I am thankful to know you are at last doing the right thing. What does Sir Bartholomew say to you?"

"You are gratuitously assuming that I went to him as a patient," said De Benham, looking more and more annoyed.

"Of course, I assume it. But there!—keep your own counsel, if you prefer it."

They were strolling slowly up the street as they talked; and now, having reached the top, turned as by tacit agreement, and strolled slowly back again. Not till they had so turned, did De Benham speak again.

"If I do keep my own counsel, Archie," he said at length, "it is from no want of regard, or gratitude, toward yourself. I do not forget how you nursed me day and night when I was sick, and helpless, and almost dying. I can never forget that, dear old fellow." (And here he put his hand affectionately through Archie's arm.) "But—but it may be that I am more nervous about myself than I need be—and without sufficient cause—and that, having made up my mind to say nothing to any one—I'm sure, however, you understand what I mean."

"I don't know what you wish me to understand," said Archie, bluntly; "but what I do understand is, that you believe yourself to be in a bad way, and wish to keep it secret from every one but the doctor."

De Benham almost stamped with impatience. "No—no—no," he said, irritably. "You wholly misapprehend me. I do not believe that I am in a bad way. I don't doubt that I even fancy myself worse than I am. And I *know* that

I have no kind of organic disease—none whatever. Sir Bartholomew Baxter assures me of it."

"Then I can't see why—"

"That is precisely it. You can't see why I should be reserved about it; and I can't make you see why except that it is just an invalid's whim. Still, an invalid's whim, I should suppose, is reason enough."

"Oh, certainly."

"You'll oblige me by saying nothing about it?"

"About what?" said Archie.

"Well—about our present conversation."

"All right. I won't mention it."

"Nor—nor yet about Sir Bartholomew Baxter."

Archie gave the required promises; but added that he wished he could know for certain that De Benham was less ill than he looked.

"It doesn't matter how I look," De Benham replied, "so long as there is nothing organically wrong. Change of air and scene is all I need. Before I have been a month away, I shall be stronger than ever."

And then he looked at his watch, and declared that he had not another moment to spare.

"I have an appointment," he said, "at a quarter before nine; and it is that already."

"You're just at the door, however," replied Archie, taking his destination for granted.

Again De Benham reddened, and looked vexed.

"Very true," he said, hastily. "Very true. By-the-way, Sir Bartholomew doesn't know who I am, or any thing about me—so be sure you never come inquiring if I am here, or any thing of that sort."

"No, no—not I."

"And you will keep your promises faithfully, I know."

To which Archie once more responded, "All right;" and then, being arrived at Sir Bartholomew's house, they shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER LXI.

ANTE-NUPTIAL.

THE month that elapsed between the date of the announcement in the *Morning Post* and the eventful twenty-fifth of April went by as such intervals are wont to go by; that is to say, busily, and therefore quickly. Miss Hardwicke was absorbed, for the most part, in the ordering of her trousseau, and De Benham in the study of estimates, architectural drawings, and so forth; for he was now fast setting the works on foot at Benhampton, and arranging how they should be carried forward in his absence. His mother, too, for whose use a special *suite* of rooms was to be prepared in the new building, had decided to settle meanwhile in a furnished house that happened just then to be vacant about half-way between Monmouth and Benhampton; and he was anxious to establish her in her new home before he left England. It was a pretty little house enough, with a garden, a paddock, and accommodation for a pony and chaise; but it wanted many comforts, to supply which took up no small share of the young man's time and thoughts. And then, besides all this, there were settlements to be drawn up, and a world of subsidiary matters to be attended to on all hands.

It so happened, therefore, that the engaged people did not see very much of each other in these days. De Benham was continually going down into Monmouthshire; and by-and-by Miss Hardwicke also left town, having elected to spend the last fortnight of her maiden life at her brother's seat in Kent—an old, rambling, gabled, turreted, red-brick mansion of the Elizabethan period, purchased by her father some forty years before.

De Benham, however, ran over twice to Hardwicke Hall in the course of that last fortnight; arriving the first time about an hour before dinner and leaving early the next morning; and remaining the second time from Saturday to Monday. But there was even then so much business to be discussed that his visits had in them as little of the character of a lover's visits as can well be imagined. Their talk when they were together was of wings and gateways, machicolations and battlements, capitals, mouldings, traceries, and the like; sometimes, also, of investments and land; but of happy years to come, and tender promises, and sweet hopes reaching far into the golden future—never.

Still, De Benham went creditably through the business of his part; especially on the occasion of his last visit to Hardwicke Hall—going to church on the Sunday, for instance, and sitting next to Claudia in the great cushioned family pew, at both morning and afternoon service; sharing her hymn-book when they sang; walking with her in the grounds after luncheon; and fulfilling all those devoirs and observances due from an engaged man toward the lady by whom he is to be made happy in less than a week. For when De Benham went down into Kent that Saturday afternoon, they were to be married in London on the following Thursday.

Yet, even now, as he walked by her, and talked to her, and sat with her, and called her by her name, it seemed to him as if he could not believe that she was in truth to be his wife—that in the course of a few more days they two were to be indissolubly united—that for at least the next eight or ten months, if not for a still longer time, they were to be utterly alone together, strangers in strange lands—strangers even to each other. What should they talk about, he sometimes asked himself, in those long evenings which they must soon be spending together in solitary Swiss and Italian hotels? What pursuits, what tastes were they likely to have in common? Should he ever know her much more intimately than he knew her now? And then he thought with a kind of blank despair of that far-off time when, if they both lived, they should both have grown old and weary—wearied of the long years, and weary of each other.

"I really think we had better push on at once for Amiens," said he, as they sat together that Sunday evening with a traveling map of Europe spread out between them on the table. "We leave London Bridge, you see, by the tidal train at twelve, and arrive at Boulogne at six thirty-five. A couple of hours more would carry us to Amiens, where, instead of the dirt and noise of Boulogne, we find a quaint old town, and a fine cathedral."

"I detest Boulogne," said Miss Hardwicke.

"You don't think it would make the journey too fatiguing?"

"Not for me. We have generally gone through to Paris without stopping."

"Our rooms in Paris are engaged," said De Benham. "I have stipulated for a *salon* overlooking the garden of the Tuileries."

"That will be very pleasant," she replied.

And then, for a few minutes, they were both silent. Mr. Hardwicke, meanwhile, was dozing over his paper in the adjoining drawing-room.

"I have calculated that we shall be at Lucerne about Saturday week," De Benham said, presently. "That is allowing five whole days in Paris, one day from Paris to Troyes, another from Troyes to Basle, and the last from Basle to Lucerne."

"The best hotel at Lucerne," said Miss Hardwicke, "is the *Schweizerhof*."

"I fear there is not much novelty for you in Switzerland, Claudia," said De Benham.

"I don't care for novelty," she replied, indifferently.

"The greater part of Italy, however, will be new to you."

"Yes. I know only Florence and Milan."

"See," said De Benham, running his finger along the map as he spoke, "here lies our route: Florence—Rome—Naples—Sicily—Cephalonia—Corinth—Athens—the Dardanelles—Constantinople. Now we reach our limit, and begin to turn our faces westward. Constantinople to Trieste by steamer—Venice—Vienna—Prague—Dresden—Berlin—the Hague—Amsterdam—home."

"It is an immense journey," said Miss Hardwicke.

"We are not obliged to carry out our programme; we can turn back when we please."

"Of course."

And then they were silent again.

"We have undertaken a still longer journey together, Claudia," De Benham said, presently, trying hard to infuse some little tenderness into his voice. "I trust it will be a—happy one."

"I trust so too," she answered; not lifting her eyes, however, from the map.

"It depends, I suppose, upon ourselves."

"I suppose so."

He looked at her as if he would read her through and through; but there was nothing to read—not the slightest passing tremor, not the faintest variation of color. Her voice was as level, her attitude as indifferent, as if they were discussing probabilities of rain or sunshine.

Just then the *Twin Giants* made their appearance, each carrying a mahogany form, which he placed close against the front drawing-room door. Then came the butler with a reading-desk and a pyramid of prayer-books, and deposited the same with much solemnity upon the table at which his master was sitting; the women-servants followed next, in order of domestic precedence; and lastly, the two coachmen and three grooms. The household being now all assembled, De Benham and Claudia came in from the farther drawing-room, and Mr. Hardwicke read prayers.

Then the servants trooped out again in single file; the bedroom candles were brought; and Mr. Hardwicke, having invited De Benham to a cigar in the library, discreetly withdrew.

"It is good-by, Claudia, as well as good-night," said the young man, when they were left

alone. "I shall be gone to-morrow morning before your breakfast hour."

"You really take the first train?"

"I must, in order that my mother may not be traveling too late."

"Lady De Benham has not yet seen her house?"

"Not yet; nor has she visited Benhampton since my father was buried there."

"I hope she will like the cottage," said Miss Hardwicke.

"Ay—and the servants, and the pony and chaise—if she is not too lonely."

"It will amuse her to watch the progress of the building."

"Yes—and she will have my letters. However, this is but a flying visit. I bring her back again on Wednesday."

Miss Hardwicke took up her candle.

"You also go to town on Wednesday?" said De Benham.

"At the latest."

"Then we meet no more till Thursday morning—in the church, Claudia." And as he said this, De Benham took her hand, and tried again to make his accents sound more lover-like.

Miss Hardwicke smiled, faintly.

"Good-night," she said, withdrawing her hand, and moving toward the door.

"Good-night," he replied, and touched her cheek lightly with his lips. And then he went down for half an hour and smoked a cigarette with his future brother-in-law in the big Gothic library down stairs.

He left the house next morning before seven, and was driven to the station by Mr. Hardwicke. Claudia, who never breakfasted before nine, was not even awake when he went away. All that day his mother and he were traveling down to Monmouth, and in the evening they supped together in a sitting-room of the Beaufort Arms hotel, overlooking the market-place. The next morning they started early, and went to see the little home that he had prepared for her use—a charming cottage embowered in roses, with a rustic veranda, a thatched roof, and a garden nearly two acres in extent. Here Lady De Benham found on the walls engravings from her favorite pictures; in the book-case, copies of her favorite authors; in her stable and coach-house, a shaggy-looking pony and a basket-chaise, with a seat behind for the smart groom who stood by, hat in hand, waiting to put the pony in and drive his new mistress to Benhampton. Seeing with what love and care her son had provided all these things for her comfort, Lady De Benham tried to forget for a while that she was so soon to be parted from him, and to be as happy as he desired that she should be.

From the cottage they drove in the new chaise to Benhampton, where they found a crowd of masons already at work upon the outer walls, and a clerk of the works established in the little nook which used to be occupied by the Bowstead family. Having gone over every part of the ruins, and compared the existing remains with the architect's plans and drawings, they then walked down the hill together to the church. Here Lady De Benham, who had crossed that threshold but once before, and then on the saddest day in all her life, knelt down under the north window against the chancel, bowed her

face upon her hands, and murmured a prayer over the spot where lay the husband of her youth.

"It was nearly twenty years ago," she said, rising up, pale and tearful. "Twenty sorrowful years ago—but it seems like yesterday."

"It was yesterday—it is to-day," replied her son, sorrowfully. "There is no past for those who love."

They walked round the church, and looked at the monuments.

"They were a goodly family," said Lady De Benham; "and you, Temple, are the last of their name and race."

"I would I were not so," he replied, gloomily.

"It seems incredible that—that he should be no nearer to us now, and no more, than one of these."

"Nay, mother, one may do worse than go over to so noble a majority."

Lady De Benham shook her head, and smiled sadly.

"Alas! my son," she said. "A majority of dust and ashes!"

The young man looked round, and his eye kindled.

"Diamond dust, then—every grain of it!" he said, proudly. "See, mother—two years ago I stood before that altar, in the presence of these dead, and I vowed, because they were my people, and for the sake of the name I bore, to win back the lands they had won; and to build up the house they had built; and to be, for their honor more than for my own, De Benham of Benhampton. I have kept my vow—in two years—in two short years!"

As he said this his color changed, and he leaned against a pillar for support.

"It is nothing," he faltered. "Only the old giddiness."

"Your hand is cold—you tremble! Oh, the fatal vow! I see it all now—and you have sacrificed your health to keep it."

"I would do it again," he answered, recovering himself by an effort. "I would sacrifice all that I have sacrificed twice over—ay, ten times over—to achieve the same end."

"Heaven grant that you have not sacrificed your happiness, too, my own boy!" said Lady De Benham, with a pang of apprehension. "I have sometimes feared of late—"

He interrupted her by an imperious gesture.

"Hush!" he exclaimed. "Not a word of that, mother. Shall we go out into the air?"

CHAPTER LXII.

A MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

THE morning of the 25th of April dawned gray and misty, and cold. To say that it rained would be incorrect, and to say that it was merely damp would be even less true. But an almost inappreciable and constantly descending moisture filled the atmosphere, clouded the windows, brought down the blacks by myriads, and covered pavements, and balconies, and iron railings with a horrible cold perspiration. The streets looked inexpressibly dismal—only a little less dismal than the squares. The parks—especially the Regent's Park—were sloughs of despond. It was a day to chill the marrow in one's bones, to



promote emigration, to foster meditations upon suicide, to do any thing, in short, but get married.

De Benham, rising at seven after an almost sleepless night, sick and shivering from his tub, stealing noiselessly past his mother's bedroom door, and tearing down to Saville Row in a Hansom before eight, looked out upon the dreary pavement and the murky sky with a kind of grim satisfaction. For in his heart all was gloom and despondency, and the cheerless weather befitted the cheerlessness of his mood.

"Do you think I shall live?" he said, abruptly, having been closeted with Sir Bartholomew Baxter for some ten minutes or more, and rising to take his leave.

"Certainly, if you are but commonly careful of your general health," replied the great man.

"I will try to be so."

"You ought not, for instance, to travel in such weather as this. Can you not put off your journey till to-morrow?"

"Impossible."

"Why impossible, when to do so is essential to—"

"Because at half past ten this morning I am to be hung, and at twelve precisely my remains are to be conveyed out of the country," interrupted De Benham, with a bitter smile; "that is to say, I am about to be married."

Sir Bartholomew looked the surprise which he was too polite to express.

"In that case," he said, "I can not do better for you than to pass you on to my friend, Dr. Cherbuliez, of Paris. See him daily, as long as you remain there; and, for the rest, avoid all extremes of climate, and lead the simplest life in your power."

"Many thanks," said De Benham. "I will do my best. Good-morning, Sir Bartholomew."

"Good-morning, Mr. Temple."

And then "Mr. Temple" got into his cab, was driven home at a gallop, and stole up again to his bedroom before Lady De Benham dreamed that he was more than half-way through his morning toilette.

In the mean while Claudia, seated before her glass and surrounded by her tire-women, scarcely observed the weather. She saw that the day was dull, but she did not even know that it was cold. For to the luxurious bedrooms of Strathellan House, with their double windows and doors, heavy *portière* curtains, and carpets of Wilton and Axminster pile, no chill or damp from the outer world could possibly penetrate.

As she sat thus—one of her maids brushing her long hair, another going noiselessly to and fro between the bedroom and dressing-room, finishing the packing of her traveling trunks; the dress-maker and the dress-maker's assistant waiting in respectful silence till it should come to their turn to attire her in that gorgeous dress of creamy satin and delicate lace already displayed upon the bed—Claudia Hardwicke leaned back with half-closed eyes and folded hands, and told herself that she was well content with the life she had chosen.

Estimating her beauty and fortune at their value, she had resolved from her earliest childhood to achieve position. It was the one good thing which she prized above all other good things of the world. Living ever among moneyed citizens, she had come to aspire almost passionately to that purer and finer air in which the upper ten thousand live and have their being. And now this good thing was to be hers; this finer air to be her daily atmosphere. Already she saw herself mistress of a spacious town-house in Grosvenor or Portman Square, going to Court, driving in the Park with her powdered footmen and her coroneted carriage, entertaining, visiting, presiding over the opening festivities at Benhampton Castle, holding her own among the noblest in the land.

And even now, as she sat before her glass, she had but to lift her eyes and feast them with evidences of this brilliant future. On yonder chair stood her new dressing-case (one of her brother's many costly gifts), with its superb fittings of gold and ivory—every stopper, every lid, every hair-brush in it engraved with her coronet and cipher. On the dressing-table before her, grouped in two large cases, lay Mr. Hardwicke's latest offering—a suit of emeralds and pearls, necklace and tiara, ear-rings, bracelets, and brooch; a truly royal gift, brought to her bedside this very morning before she was awake, and entered in Emmanuel's books at a price not to be expressed in less than five numerals. And there, too, upon another table close by, lay heaped a variety of other presents, all more or less declaratory of the wealth of the donors.

As Claudia Hardwicke looked round upon these things, and thought these thoughts, a feeling of triumph swelled in her heart, and again she told herself that she had done well and wisely, and that her lot in life was pre-eminently fortunate.

Let it not be concluded, however, that the man whom she was about to marry went for nothing in this estimate. He stood in it for an important item. Miss Hardwicke was proud of Temple De Benham—proud of his ancient and noble descent, of his seniority among his peers, of his personal gifts, of his resolute character, his gallantry, his enterprise, his success. She compared him with the men whom she had met in society, and she knew that she preferred him before them

all. Lord Stockbridge, though an Earl and a man of fashion, was not to be named in the same breath. Of love, in the true acceptance of the word—intense, devoted, passionate, irresponsible—Miss Hardwicke knew nothing, and desired to know nothing. Had any one ventured to tell her that she was even capable of such love, she would have deemed herself insulted by the supposition. But she knew herself to be capable of a decided preference, and this preference she accorded without reservation to Temple De Benham.

So the morning hours wore on, and bride and bridegroom, and many a guest in different parts of the town, prepared for the feast, and put on their wedding garments; for there were between thirty and forty invited to the ceremony, and a hundred and fifty to the breakfast; and in the evening there was to be an immense party, and dancing in the great ball-room built out by Mr. Hardwicke when his sister came of age. Meanwhile, Gunter's men, in shirt-sleeves and aprons, were busy in the dining-room preparing the breakfast; and in Marylebone Church were pew-openers bustling to and fro, dusting the hassocks, uncovering the altar-cloth, and putting things straight in the vestry; and the curates, in a flutter of expectation, were awaiting the arrival of the Right Rev. Lord Bishop, who was to perform the ceremony; and the beadle was arraying himself, like Solomon, in all his glory; and chill and shivering were the bridesmaids as they made their appearance by ones and twos at Strathellan House, and were received by Mr. Hardwicke in the drawing-room.

And here, for the benefit of such as delight in fashionable intelligence, it may be mentioned that there were eight of these young ladies attired in clouds of diaphanous tulle, and veils, and wreaths of pink and white roses—like eight inferior brides; and that one of them (the oldest and ugliest) was an honorable. The next day's *Morning Post* described them vaguely, but poetically, as a "galaxy."

At length, when the bride was dressed and ready, and the guests had driven off in advance, and the bridesmaids had been packed into two carriages and sent on by themselves, there came a moment when Mr. Hardwicke and his sister were left in the drawing-room alone. It was but a moment, and he seized it to say one last word to her in the home that had been his and hers together.

"Claudia—my own sister—my darling!" he faltered. "I pray that you may be happy."

"I am happy," she answered, smiling.

"I thank God for it," said Mr. Hardwicke, solemnly.

He would fain have embraced her once more; but he could not kiss her cheek, because of her veil; nor her hands, because they were gloved; so he took up a corner of the veil and pressed it to his lips; and as he did so the tears were running down his cheeks.

"My lady's carriage waits," said the butler, flinging open the door, and giving his mistress her title by anticipation.

The next minute they were driving through the Park in the big, old-fashioned chariot, which for some years past they had only used on state occasions.

Damp and greasy were the steps of Marylebone Church; shivering and shabby was the

crowd about the porch; frosty were the noses of the galaxy drawn up in order within. Yet were these discomforts momentarily forgotten as the bride swept up the nave leaning upon the arm of her brother, and the bridesmaids fell into procession behind her, and the organ began to play softly, and the Bishop opened his book, and the bridegroom came forward in his place. Then the ceremony began immediately, and a sudden hush fell upon the whole church.

Near the altar stood Lady De Benham, Mr. Hardwicke, Archie Blyth, and the parents of the bridesmaids. The rest of the guests filled the nearest pews; and the strangers, of whom there was a large number, crowded the side aisles and galleries.

Archie's eyes were wandering, meanwhile, all over the church in search of Miss Alleyne.

"I mean to be there on Thursday," she had said to him a day or two before. "You will not see me; but I shall be looking on all the time from some dark corner."

And then Archie had remonstrated, advising her against it as earnestly as he dared; but she put his remonstrances and his advice somewhat peremptorily aside.

"I have promised myself that I will be present at this marriage, Mr. Blyth," she said; "and I mean to be present. Nay, do not look so apprehensive! Do you suppose that I shall glide between them at the altar, like the ghost in the old legend, and carry off the ring? or confront your cousin with bowl and dagger, like Queen Eleanor?"

And thus, with a little quivering laugh, she turned the thing aside, and Archie said no more.

Now, however, instead of listening to one word of that solemn service which was fast binding two lives together for good or ill till death should sunder them, he was scrutinizing every bonnet in the galleries, trying to pierce the gloom behind every pillar, and the shadows in every corner; but nowhere saw he the outline of any face or form that reminded him of the face or form of Juliet Alleyne.

And now, the promises being spoken, the ring given, and the hands joined, the Bishop pronounced that Temple De Benham and Claudia Hardwicke were man and wife together before God. Then he blessed them with the solemn blessing of the ritual; and the choir broke into a joyous anthem; and in some ten minutes more it was all over.

When De Benham rose from his knees, and gave his arm to his bride, and found himself presently in the vestry shaking hands with this person and that, he felt as if he were waking from some strange dream. When one of the curates handed Claudia the pen, and, laying his finger upon the blank space in the register, said, "Here, if you please, Lady De Benham," that title, which he had never thought of till now except as his mother's exclusive right, jarred unpleasantly upon his ear. The very sight of her signature close against his own, with the ink yet wet upon both, startled him. It seemed to him as if he had just traversed a profound gulf separating his past life from his future; and as if the bridge by which he had crossed over had suddenly given way, and crashed into the abyss behind him.

But as he led her from the church, and heard the open admiration of the crowd about the



"'I'M SO GLAD TO HAVE FOUND YOU!' EXCLAIMED ARCHIE."

door, and took his place beside her in the post-chaise, which, with its four grays and two postillions, immediately dashed off at full speed through York Gate and into the Regent's Park, he did feel a momentary flush of pride and triumph.

"My imperial beauty!" he exclaimed, pressing his lips upon her arm with something like real fervor.

But Claudia, with a somewhat heightened color, drew slightly back and made no reply; and De Benham saw that she considered he had taken a liberty.

In the mean while the bridesmaids and the rest of the guests were grumbling at the weather, and getting into any carriages that came first, and it was not till they were all back at Strathellan House that Archibald Blyth was found to be missing. But Archie, at the last moment, just as the bridal procession was on its way to the church door, had caught a sudden glimpse of Miss Alleyne. It was but for an instant that her face flashed out upon him from behind a crowd of others, and, even in the moment of his recognition of it, vanished. But that glimpse was enough for Archie. With a muttered word of unintelligible apology, he dropped the arm of the lady whom he was escorting, made his way round by a side aisle, and found her in a dark pew under the organ-gallery. She was sitting with her hands folded listlessly together, and a pale fixed look upon her face, waiting till the

crowd should disperse, and she could get away unnoticed.

"I'm so glad to have found you!" exclaimed Archie. "I've been looking for you all the time. Did you come alone?"

"Yes—all alone," she replied, smiling.

But the smile, such as it was, so touched him that he sat down beside her in the pew, and took her hand.

"It has been a grand wedding," she said, tremulously. "Who was the lady in gray satin that stood next to Mr. Hardwicke?"

"That was Lady De Benham—at least the Dowager Lady De Benham," replied Archie, awkwardly.

"I thought so. He is not like her; but he has her eyes."

And then for some moments they sat listening to the confusion of voices in the porch, and the continuous clatter of wheels outside, as carriage after carriage drove off with its freight.

"Either she is more beautiful than ever, or I did not know how beautiful she was," said Miss Alleyne, presently.

Archie, not knowing what to reply to this observation, said nothing.

"They ought to be happy," she continued, more to herself than to him. "They have every thing in the world to make them so."

As she said this, she turned her face away and drew down her veil; and Archie saw that she was crying.

"Oh, don't do that—pray don't," he said, in great distress. "What's the good, now? They'll be happy enough, depend on it—as happy as they deserve to be, any how."

"I hope so. I hope they may be very, very happy. I shall pray that it may be so."

"You'd much better forget all about them," said Archie, bluntly.

And then, seeing that her tears continued to flow silently, he took her hand again, and caressed it—as one might comfort a crying child.

"It's such a pity," he said, "that you should throw your heart away, my darling. He never really loved you—he couldn't have been false, you know, if he had. It may be that he doesn't love her either. I don't believe he does. I believe he loves no one but himself, and his ambition, and his precious ancestors, who, now that they're all dead, might as well never have been born. Forget him, dear. Forget him, and—and try to think a little bit of me instead. I'm neither a lord, nor a genius, nor particularly clever in any way—but I'd sacrifice any thing on earth to make you happy. A fellow can not do more, you know, than be true and honest, and love a girl with his whole heart."

And by the time that he had got thus far, Archie, not without some amazement at his own temerity, fairly put his arm round Miss Alleyne's waist. At this she rose hurriedly, protesting that they should be locked up in the church if they sat there any longer.

"No fear of that," said Archie. "The carriages have not yet done taking up."

"I must go, at all events. It is past eleven."

"I mean to see you safe home."

"Impossible. You are bound to be present at the breakfast."

"The breakfast be hanged!" said Archie.

"But—"

"But see, now—if you'd only give me ever such a tiny scrap of hope to hold on by, I should be so wild with joy that my cousin Hardwicke's cold chickens and Champagne would just choke me. And if, on the other hand, you were to tell me that it's all of no use—why, then the wine would be like poison, and the food like dust and ashes in my mouth. So, either way, you see, it's of no use for me to go to the breakfast."

Miss Alleyne opened the pew-door.

"It will be kindest, then," she said, with something like a sparkle of the old smile, "to give you no answer whatever."

And with this, she passed on quickly to the door. In the porch they waited for a moment. The last carriage was just driving away; the bells were clashing joyously overhead, and the few remaining loiterers were opening their umbrellas and preparing to be gone.

"Listen to the bells!" said Archie. "Don't you remember what your favorite Tennyson says?—

'Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow;
The year is going—let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.'

Let them ring out the old, false love for you, my darling—let them ring in the new love, and the true."

"I shall never forgive myself, Mr. Blyth," said she, "if you do not go to that breakfast this

morning and make a speech. You'd do it beautifully."

"It's cruel to laugh at me, Miss Alleyne," said Archie, reproachfully. "I am in earnest, remember."

"And I have been in earnest so long that I am tired of it. You ought to make the speech, however. Those lines would come in charmingly if you returned thanks for the bridesmaids. I had no idea that you quoted poetry, Mr. Blyth."

Archie, to escape, ran down the steps and called a cab. When he had put her into it, he stood for a moment with his hand upon the door, regardless of the misting rain and all his bridal splendor.

"Look here, Miss Alleyne," he said, with more agitation of manner than he had yet betrayed, "if I'm to be miserable, I may as well know it at once. Either let me see you home now, or send me away forever."

"Supposing that I do neither—or both?"

"No, no—do the one or the other, I beseech you! As long as I hadn't spoken out, the suspense was bearable; but when I saw you crying just now, and when I knew all the time how much I loved you, the words came somehow in spite of me."

"I am afraid you will get very wet, standing there without an umbrella," said Miss Alleyne, provokingly.

Archie's lip quivered.

"Pray, give me an answer," he pleaded.

"Well, then—for fear you should take cold, and because you have no umbrella—you may see me home."

Archie jumped into the cab, and shut the door.

The Fates, apparently, had ordained that this young lady should be wooed—and won—in church.

CHAPTER LXIII.

MAN AND WIFE.

AT five minutes past twelve precisely the tidal train glided away from the London Bridge Station, carrying with it De Benham and his bride, her ladyship's maid, a fierce-looking Italian courier in a blue cap with a gold band, and a mountain of luggage. The newly-married pair were installed in a compartment by themselves. They had had sharp work to get down to the station in time, and had driven off at the last moment without saying good-by to the guests in the drawing-room.

"If it hadn't been for Bruno, we should never have done it," said De Benham, when he had stowed the umbrellas and parasols in the netting overhead, and counted the wraps and rugs, and seen that his wife's dressing-case was under the seat.

"I suppose not," said Claudia.

"And we started five minutes after time as it was. It would have been very awkward if we had missed this train."

"Very awkward."

"There is no other till 3.30, and no boat before 11.15 at night. We must have put off crossing till to-morrow."

"Even that would not have been so disagreeable as waiting in London for three hours and a half," said the bride.

"No, indeed. I scarcely know what we could have done. To go back to the breakfast would have been too absurd. In more propitious weather, we might have improved our minds by going over the Tower, or up the Monument, or through the Thames Tunnel."

Lady De Benham smiled faintly, and said: "How preposterous!"

"But to-day, even those pleasures would have been impossible."

"I hope we shall find better weather on the other side of the Channel," said Claudia. "Paris is so dreary when it rains."

And then they both gazed out of the window in silence. They had by this time left behind them the brick-fields and cabbage-grounds that lie between the Borough and New Cross, and were speeding on toward Croydon; but even the pleasant Surrey hills in their April greenery looked dismal and uninviting.

"I am inclined to think that Bruno is an acquisition," said De Benham, presently.

Bruno was the fierce-looking courier with the gold band, now fast inaugurating a flirtation with the lady's-maid in a second-class carriage adjoining.

"Yes; he seems to understand his business," replied Claudia.

And then the conversation dropped again.

They rushed through Croydon and some smaller stations without stopping, and halted for three minutes at Red Hill, where De Benham bought a *Times*, and some other newspapers.

"We shall be glad of them by-and-by, on board the steamer," he said, half-apologetically; for they were still in the first hour of their journey, and he felt that it would be unpardonable in him to want amusement already.

"Are you a good sailor?"

"Yes. That is, I can cross the Channel without discomfort."

"Such a mist as this acts like oil upon the sea," observed De Benham. "It will be as smooth as a mill-pond out yonder."

He was forcing himself to say something; but he had literally nothing to say. Two dreadful pauses had already occurred, and he felt that a third must be prevented somehow. And then it was his place to find topics—to make the miles pass pleasantly—to begin to evince something like devotion and vivacity, and marital tenderness. All this, he knew, was incumbent upon him; but how, in Heaven's name, he asked himself, was he to do it? His ideas were stagnant, his spirits profoundly depressed, his very accents weighted with constraint. Resolved, however, to keep up the conversation this time, if possible, he plunged desperately into the pages of his continental *Bradshaw*.

"We are allowed three-quarters of an hour at Boulogne for refreshments," he said; "but we don't get there till half past four. You will want something long before then."

"I think not," replied the bride.

"They are just about sitting down to breakfast now at Strathellan House."

"I am so glad we decided not to stay for it," said Claudia.

"So am I. It is a horrible ceremony. Nevertheless, I wish you had taken luncheon before you started. Are you sure you feel no draught from those ventilators?"

To this inquiry she replied that she felt no draught from the ventilators, but that her feet were very cold—whereupon De Benham wrapped them in a rug, with much apparent solicitude.

"I must try to take such good care of you!" he said, smiling.

And then, having faced her up to this time, he changed into the seat adjoining hers.

"You must take care of yourself also," replied Claudia. "To-day, you have been looking paler than ever."

"Have I? That is unfortunate; for I wanted to look my best this morning. It will not do for your people to say that you have married a ghost."

"Try then to become less ghostlike and more corporeal."

"I will do my best. I have been somewhat overtaking myself, you know, of late—there has been so much to do and to think of."

And with this he sighed, and leaned back, and relapsed into silence.

By this time they were nearing Tunbridge, and the day, instead of clearing as the afternoon wore on, seemed to be perpetually growing murkier and more misty. By-and-by a thick steam settled on the glasses, and obscured the watery landscape.

Then, Tunbridge being passed, and a long half hour having elapsed unbroken by the utterance of a word on either side, De Benham asked his wife if she would like to see the *Times*.

"It is so difficult," he said, "to talk in the train."

She took the paper, and presently laid it aside, and said:

"I have been thinking that I should like to go to Zollenstrasse."

De Benham, already deep in the *Daily News*, looked up surprised.

"To Zollenstrasse?" he repeated.

"Yes. Could we take it on the way?"

"Not without a wide *détour* and the loss of several days."

"Really?"

"But the place would not interest you."

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it. The country round is not more than ordinarily pretty; and in the town there is nothing to attract a stranger."

Claudia, looking out of the window, heard these objections without replying to them.

"For myself, of course it is different," continued De Benham. "I am interested in the place because it is full of early associations; but you, having no such associations, would be bored to death there."

"I have certainly no wish to die from ennui," said the bride; and resumed the reading of her newspaper.

But she was wounded; and De Benham was unconscious of having said any thing to wound her. It never occurred to him that she might wish to see the place because so many years of his life had been spent there. Had Juliet Alleyne, in the sweet Cillingford time, told him that he must some day take her to Zollenstrasse, he would have known at once that she longed to make his past her own—that the little house in which he had lodged, and the streets through which he had passed every day to his work, and the class-rooms where he had studied, and the

examination-hall which had been the scene of his academic triumphs, would all have been dear and sacred in her eyes. And he would have taken her in his arms, and thanked her for the loving wish, and promised her with many promises. But that Claudia—his wife—should be interested in the place for his sake, never crossed his mind for a single moment. He took it for granted she only fancied to visit Zollenstrasse as she might fancy Ems, or Schlangenbad, or Weisbaden, or any other little German Spa; and in such case he knew that she would be disappointed. For himself, he felt that he should hardly care to go back to the old scenes *en grand seigneur*, hampered with a wife, a lady's-maid, and a courier. So he threw cold water on the proposal, and, having assured her that she would be bored to death at Zollenstrasse if she went there, dismissed the subject from his thoughts.

And so it was that he went back to his *Daily News*, and she to her *Times*, and that not another word was spoken between them till they reached Folkestone.

CHAPTER LXIV.

LADY DE BENHAM ASSUMES THE DUTIES OF HER POSITION.

NOTHING could well be more comfortless than the crossing. The air was chill, and raw, and stagnant. The blacks came down in clouds. The mist closed about their path like a curtain, and there was scarcely any perceptible motion; so that from the moment they drew off from the one pier-head till they almost bumped against the timbers of the other, the steamer almost seemed to be lying still upon the waters. De Benham would fain have had his wife go down to the ladies' cabin, but she preferred the wet decks and the rain; so he covered her with rugs, and the courier brought a stool for her feet, and she was made as comfortable as the place and the weather permitted. This done, De Benham said he would go aft and smoke a cigar; and so left her sitting under her umbrella.

Landing at Boulogne by-and-by in the rain, they sent Bruno to get their luggage through the Custom-house, and drove direct to the station. Here they dried their steaming wraps by the fire; and had some soup and cold chicken at a little table in the warmest corner of the refreshment buffet.

"Are you quite sure—dearest," said De Benham, "that you prefer to go on to Amiens this evening?"

He had been thinking all the time he was smoking his cigar on board the steamer, that he ought occasionally to make use of some term of endearment toward her; and he had decided upon "dearest" as being most consistent with their mutual position. He brought out the word, however, with some difficulty.

"I do not object to stay in Boulogne," she replied; and although she did not look up from her plate, De Benham fancied that when he called her by that name, he detected a faint gleam of gratification upon her face.

"You are not tired?"

"Not at all. I am willing to persevere as far as Paris, if you please."

"Nay. Paris is too far; but Amiens is with-

in easy reach; so we may as well stick to our programme. We shall be only an hour and forty minutes on the road."

It was past seven, and getting rapidly dusk, when they again started. De Benham having, as before, wrapped Claudia in her rugs, and seen that Bruno had forgotten none of the smaller articles, placed himself *vis-à-vis* of his bride, with his back to the engine. Then the train began to move.

"It is almost too short a journey to justify one in going to sleep," he said, lying back languidly in the seat.

The words were scarcely out of his lips when a dispatch box, which he had himself placed only the moment before, with some books and other matters, in the netting over Claudia's head, toppled suddenly forward. He saw the danger—darted at the box with uplifted hand—caught it just as it was about to fall—and, with a sharp, half-smothered ejaculation, dropped back into his place.

"What is the matter?" said Claudia.

"The box was coming down upon your head," replied De Benham, with a sort of catching in his breath.

"Is that all?"

"All? You don't know what a weight it is!"

"I fancied you had sprained your wrist," said Claudia.

"No; oh no!"

With this De Benham rose up and changed over to a seat by the farthest window, so putting the width of the whole carriage between himself and his bride.

"Would it inconvenience you," he said, presently, "if I were to let down this glass for a few moments?"

She replied that it would not inconvenience her at all; so he opened the window and sat for a long time in silence, looking out upon the wild country and the wilder sky. For the mist had lifted at the approach of evening, and was now rolling off toward the southwest; and where the sun had gone down a lurid glow streamed out far and wide upon the horizon, reddening the barren sand dunes and the sluggish Somme as it wound away and widened toward the sea. Then the glow faded, and the dusk thickened; and, the coast country being left behind, deep cuttings and plantations of gloomy firs closed in upon the line on either side. And then, ere long it became pitch-dark, so that there was no light save from the oil-lamp overhead.

"Claudia," said De Benham, "are you asleep?"

It was about twenty minutes since he had changed into the seat by the window, and all that time he had been silent, leaning somewhat forward with his cheek upon his hand.

"No," she replied, coldly; "but I thought you were."

"Have you any Eau de Cologne?"

"Yes; a large flask."

Then, struck by something unusual in his attitude and in the tone of his voice, she hastened to find the flask, saying, "I am sure you are not well."

"I—I am not very well," he replied.

"What is it? Are you feeling faint? Are you in pain?"

"Faint—very faint."

She bent over him; she saturated her own handkerchief with Eau de Cologne; she bathed his head and his hands.

"You will be better presently," she said, gently.

"Thanks; that will do. I am so sorry to give you this trouble."

And then he rested his head wearily against the corner of the carriage. As he did so the light from above fell full upon his face, and Claudia was startled to see how white and haggard he had suddenly become.

"Had we not better stop," she said, "at the next station?"

But he would not hear of this. He was bent on Amiens. "Bruno," he said, "should get him a glass of wine at the buffet. If he had but a glass of wine—or, better still, a glass of brandy—he could go on quite well."

The next station being Montreuil, the brandy was procured, and they went on, De Benham leaning up silently in his corner, Claudia in the opposite seat, anxiously watching him: Then, for some ten minutes or so, seeing that his eyes were closed, she thought that he had fallen asleep. They had not gone very far, however, when he spoke again.

"It's of no use," he said. "I can't hold out. We must stop—at Abbeville."

And Claudia observed that he spoke each time with increased difficulty, still catching his breath, spasmodically, between the words.

"Abbeville?" she repeated, standing up under the carriage-lamp, so as to get the light upon the pages of the *Bradshaw*. "The last station we passed was Montreuil, the next will be Rue; the next Noyelles; then Abbeville."

"How long—before we get there?"

"About a quarter of an hour."

He closed his eyes again, and said no more.

It seemed to Claudia as if that last quarter of an hour would never drag to an end—as if they should never get to Rue; and then, when Rue had flitted by, as if they should never get to Noyelles. At length, when both were passed and left behind, the pace at which they were going began to slacken, and the train glided, with a long, shrill whistle, into Abbeville station. Here she summoned the guard and the servants; dispatched Bruno for the luggage; and in a few moments had got De Benham into a kind of closed *calèche*, in which they presently found themselves rumbling along a paved country road bordered on either side by gigantic poplars.

Ill as he was, De Benham observed with surprise the calm promptitude with which his wife had at once assumed the duties of her position.

"This is a bad beginning, Claudia," he said.

"I am so sorry—for your sake."

"Not for mine—for your own. Will you lean upon me?"

"No—thanks. I feel the jolting less—this—way."

And as he spoke, he crouched forward, pressing his hand upon his side.

Claudia, seeing with what difficulty he got out the words, and with what pain he drew his breath, sat silent, and forbore to question him. And so they rumbled on their way; and the driver cracked his whip, and the harness bells jingled, and the poplars loomed through the darkness, and still Abbeville (its twinkling lights

visible all along in the distance) seemed no nearer than when they started.

At length they came to a long, straggling suburb; rattled over a draw-bridge and through a fortified gateway, and emerged presently upon an open Place bright with shops, gay with idlers, and ringing to the noisy music of an itinerant brass band. Here Bruno, jumping down from beside the driver, opened the door of the *calèche*, touched his cap, and said:

"My lord will be driven to the Hôtel Tête de Bœuf?"

"To the best, whichever that is," replied Claudia, decisively.

Whereupon the courier again touched his cap, and said, "Cocher, Tête de Bœuf," and ran forward on foot to announce their coming. The next moment they had turned into a broad, quiet street, driven under a low archway, and drawn up in the court-yard of a rambling old hotel surrounded by wooden galleries. Here, amidst much ringing of bells, they were met by the smiling landlady and her staff of waiters and maids. Seeing De Benham alight, however, leaning on the courier, and unable to support himself without assistance, the hostess became all eager commiseration.

Milord and Miladi were welcome. Was it that Milord was ill? Heaven! but he had the air of suffering. Could Milord have a quiet chamber? But without doubt. Milord should have the yellow chamber. Nothing was more tranquil than the yellow chamber. There he would be well. A doctor? Certainly! There was Monsieur the Doctor Laportaire, at the corner of the Place. François should run for him on the instant. Miladi would have nothing to fear with Monsieur the Doctor Laportaire—a man renowned throughout the Department for his skill. Would Milord and Miladi give themselves the trouble to come this way? Perhaps Milord would prefer to be carried in an arm-chair? No? It was as Milord pleased. The staircase, happily, was not steep, and the yellow chamber was here, close by—at the end of the gallery.

Thus voluble, the landlady of the Tête de Bœuf preceded her guests to a dismal room of huge dimensions, containing a catafalque of a bed surmounted with plumes of antique funeral feathers, and hung with a brocade that might once upon a time have been yellow. On the walls were faded arabesques in fresco; on the uneven floor a few scraps of threadbare tapestry; in the recesses a couple of curious black armoires with handles and scutcheons of tarnished silver. An old man in blouse and *sabots* was already upon his knees before the cavernous fire-place, kindling with his bellows such a pile of straw and fagots as might have served to burn a medieval heretic.

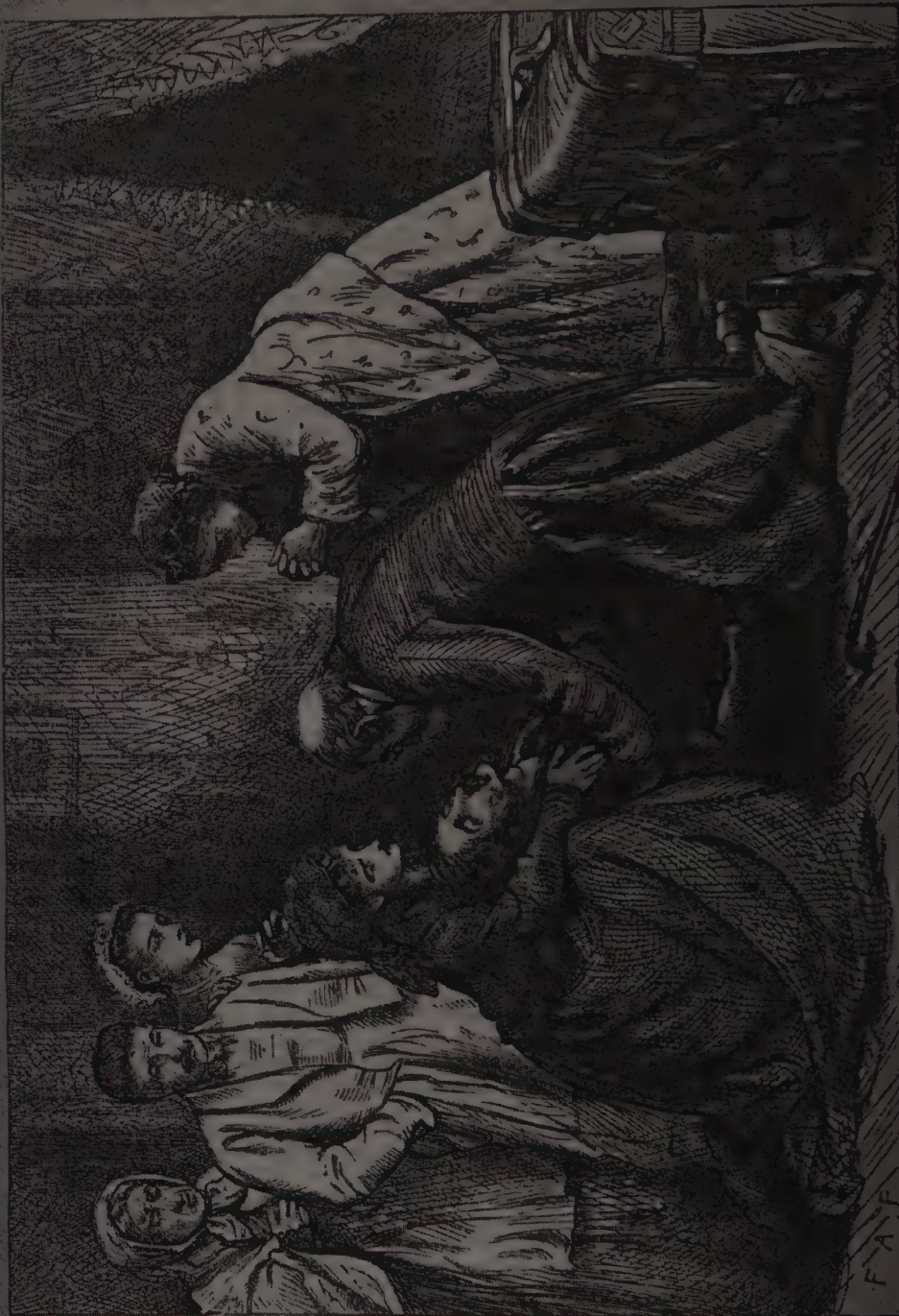
De Benham dropped into the first chair, while Bruno and the landlady wheeled a spindle-legged sofa nearer to the fire.

Claudia, bending over him, touched his hand almost timidly.

"How cold you are!" she said. "Lie down, and let me cover you with rugs till the doctor comes."

De Benham shook his head. He seemed almost past speaking.

"A few hours ago," she continued, "you talked of taking care of me; but it has come



"HE FAINTED DEAD AWAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM."

my turn first to take care of you. And I mean to do so—thoroughly."

A strange look—a look, as it were, of mental anguish, outweighing mere bodily pain—came upon the young man's pallid face.

"Claudia," he said, falteringly, "it—it is—my fault. I might have—foreseen— I—I had—no right—"

"Hush! not a word of that. Here is the doctor."

M. Laportaire (bald, bearded, spectacled, buttoned to the throat in a sort of military frock)

stood for a moment on the threshold, deciphered the situation at a glance, and glided at once into paternal possession of his patient. He felt Milord's pulse, looked at Milord's tongue, turned to Miladi for information of how the attack came on, and looked puzzled.

"There is a great want of strength," he said, taking off and wiping his glasses, "an unaccountable want of strength."

Then De Benham spoke. "I could—make my case clearer—to Monsieur Laportaire," he said, "if you would—leave us—Claudia."

The landlady and her maids had by this time dispersed to fetch sheets and other necessities; and the old fire-lighter had betaken himself with his bellows to the *salon* adjoining. Claudia at once turned thither.

"I shall be within call, Monsieur," she said, addressing herself to the doctor; and so, with a slightly heightened color, passed into the sitting-room.

The door had scarcely closed upon her when De Benham—all unconscious that he had pained her—raised himself by a desperate effort, and holding to the back of the chair, said, hurriedly:

"Monsieur—il y a cinq mois que je suis blessé, et ma blessure n'a jamais été parfaitement cicatrisée. Elle s'est ouverte de nouveau il y a à peine deux heures. Ma femme n'en sais rien. Gardez, je vous en—supplie—mon secret."

With this he made two steps toward the sofa—reeled over—would have fallen headlong, but for the doctor's strong arm about his waist—and fainted dead away in the middle of the room.

All that Monsieur Laportaire could do was to break his fall, lay him gently down upon the floor, unfasten his cravat, and call for assistance. Claudia was back instantly, through the door of communication.

"Ah, no, Madame—not you!" exclaimed the doctor, remembering his patient's injunction.

But Claudia silenced him with a look.

"It is my right, Monsieur," she said, haughtily. And then she knelt down, and supported De Benham's head upon her arm.

By this time the landlady, the courier, and a posse of maids and waiters, had crowded back into the room. Monsieur Laportaire turned them all out, except Bruno, and bade some one fetch his assistant.

"What is this?" asked Claudia, pointing to a large dark stain upon her husband's coat, just under the left breast. Then, before the doctor could reply, she turned very white, and said in a low, shuddering voice, "It is blood!"

But though her cheek paled, and her voice trembled, the fingers with which she tenderly unbuttoned his coat and waistcoat, and laid bare the stiff, ensanguined shirt beneath, never faltered.

CHAPTER LXV.

AT THE HÔTEL TÊTE DE BŒUF.

ALL that night De Benham lay in the yellow chamber at the Hôtel Tête de Bœuf, in a state which was neither sleeping nor waking, nor suffering, but simply passive and unconscious. All that night his wife watched beside his pillow. Now and then she gently touched his wrist, to make certain that the feeble pulse was still beating. Now and then she put stimulants to his lips, and he swallowed them instinctively, not knowing what hand administered them, or upon whose arm his head was lifted to take them. A profound stillness lay upon the town—a stillness interrupted only by the stamping of the post-horses in the stables, the steam-whistle of the night-trains far away, and the chimes that pealed every quarter of an hour from the Cathedral towers hard by. Sitting there hour after hour by the faint light of the embers and the shaded

lamp, Claudia could even hear the ticking of the great clock at the other side of the court-yard.

She had been urged to engage a nurse, but preferred herself to watch throughout the night. Her maid slept within call on the sofa in the *salon* adjoining; and the hotel porter, snoring on a truckle-bed in his clothes, was prepared to start up at the first tinkle of "Miladi's" bell to fetch Monsieur Laportaire.

But the dark hours dragged by and the dawn filtered in, gray and cold, and still De Benham lay speechless, motionless, almost breathless. The doctor had desired that he might be sent for, "if there was any change." But there was neither change nor sign of change. He was apparently no worse. He was certainly no better. That he should by-and-by cease to breathe, and so drift passively out of life, seemed, now, alas! the likeliest change of all.

Then dawn became day, and the sun rose in splendor, and the town woke up with ringing of bells, and shrill foreign cries, and the noise of many wheels. And then the doctor came. He drew back curtains and blinds, let in a flood of light, lifted the sick man's heavy eyelid, listened to the languid beating of his heart, counted the few and faint pulsations at his wrist, and went away with the same words as before. There was nothing to be done but to wait, and he was to be summoned immediately, "if there was any change."

So the day waxed and waned. The morning's traffic died away; the sleepy afternoon went by; evening came on, and the town woke up again to vespers, and *tables-d'hôte*, and music in the market-place. And still De Benham lay between death and life, and still his bride of yesterday watched over him with unremitting steadfastness. She made no show of grief; she shed no tears; she importuned the doctor with no questions. Her anxiety manifested itself in silence and wakefulness only. Twice in the course of the long and dreary day her maid came to her and entreated that she would lie down a while and sleep, or at least go out for half an hour into the fresh air and sunshine; but she would not.

"I am not tired, my good girl," she said; "I could not sleep if I were to try."

"But you will wear yourself out, my lady; and if you mean to sit up again to-night—"

"I mean to sit up again to-night, Foster; but I can do so without wearing myself out. You forget how strong I am."

Then Foster went away shaking her head, and sighing, and told Bruno that till now she had never dreamed that my lady cared half so much for my lord.

And the truth was that Claudia had not cared for him before as she cared for him now. She had admired him, and she had been proud of him; she had desired to know more of his past life; to enter with something like sympathy into his pursuits and tastes; to be associated with him in whatever might tend to further his ambition or gratify his family pride—but she had not loved him. It was not till the man lay before her in this his extremity of helplessness, that her heart filled for him with that rare pity that is not merely akin to, but is a vital part of love. That he should be so utterly dependent upon her, and at the same time so utterly unconscious of his dependence, was in itself enough to call

forth all the unawakened tenderness of her nature. And she knew not, as yet, that she was moved by any feeling deeper than compassion or a sense of duty. She placed all her devotion, indeed, to the side of duty; she told herself that it was her duty, as his wife, to be anxious about him, to watch over him, to wait upon him hand and foot. But she dreamed not that these duties were fast becoming to her of deeper interest than aught else in life.

So, being in truth "strong"—physically strong, and able to endure fatigue and loss of sleep—she bore up unflinchingly, and sat hour after hour through the day as through the night—pale, and stern, and silent, waiting for the change.

It came at last. It came as the dusk drew on, with a slight quickening of the languid pulse and an almost imperceptible tint of color in the lips; and Claudia believed at first that he was better. But ere long the color became a hectic flush, and the pulse beat faster and faster; and by the time the doctor came his patient was moaning and tossing—unconscious still, but actively unconscious; with the fire of fever mounting to his brain.

Finding him thus, M. Laportaire stroked his beard, shook his head, and said:

"Mais, oui—de la fièvre. Je la prévoyais."

And then, having scrawled an illegible prescription, he questioned Claudia upon this point and that, asking her with what kind of weapon De Benham's wound had been inflicted, how long he had lain ill at Horta, what had been the condition of his health since that time, and many like inquiries; to none of which she was able to give other than vague and unsatisfactory replies.

"I knew that my husband had been wounded, Monsieur," she said; "and that, owing to fatigue and exposure, and the want of proper assistance, he was laid up for some time with brain-fever at the Azores; but I have known no more than that."

M. Laportaire stroked his beard again.

"It is not a very uncommon case—this of Milord's," he said, reflectively. "In the time of war—or, rather in the beginning of peace after war—we constantly meet with instances of wounds that refuse to heal; and in six cases out of ten the sufferer conceals that he suffers. A man is ashamed, somehow, to let it be known that he carries an unhealed wound about his person."

"I can suppose that," said Claudia.

"Milord must have been in almost daily communication with some surgeon?"

"I never heard so."

"Madame has observed of late, however, that Milord was ailing?"

"I have seen that he was delicate, and that he greatly overtaxed his strength."

"Still there must have been indications—symptoms," pursued Monsieur Laportaire. "His sleep was probably disturbed—his temper irritable—his manner moody—as the manner of one oppressed by some secret care?"

"It may have been so," she replied. "I can not tell."

Then, seeing the surprise in the doctor's face, she added, in a low voice, but with singular gravity and modesty:

"We were married yesterday."

"Oh, Madame!"

And M. Laportaire, with all a Frenchman's ready chivalry, bowed profoundly, and looked the sympathy he might not take the liberty to express.

"One thing I beg you to tell me, Monsieur," said Claudia, "is there danger?"

The doctor hesitated.

"Ah, mon Dieu!" he replied, "Madame demands a very difficult question. There is danger—and, again, there is not danger. Milord is extremely weak. It is probable that he lost blood immensely when he received his wound; and because the deeper lesions belonging to the wound have been going on with latent mischief, his strength has not come back to him. And now that the wound has been exasperated by a sudden strain, Milord is in a hectic fever. I ask myself, how long will this fever last? Has Milord yet strength enough left to combat it? Will his wound fester? When Madame asks me if there is danger, I can only point to these possibilities; I can not foresee results."

"At all events, Monsieur will do whatever his skill and experience can suggest?"

M. Laportaire bowed again, and pressed his hand upon his heart.

"Madame," he said, with emotion, "je ferai tout mon possible."

Then, promising to come again very early the following morning, or at any moment of the night if she saw reason to summon him, he took his leave.

Meanwhile, the evening gayety of a French garrison town died gradually away in Abbeville, as it had died away the night before. The band in the market-place played "*Partant pour la Syrie*," and marched back to the barracks. The idlers dispersed. The cafés were closed; and the streets became dark and silent. Then, once more, the stillness of night prevailed.

And now, finding that De Benham continued to sleep the same uneasy sleep into which he had drifted as the fever came on, Claudia got out her desk and prepared to pass some of the weary hours in letter-writing. She had been thinking all day that it was her duty to write to her husband's mother; but as yet, for a twofold reason, she had delayed to do so—firstly, in the hope that when a change came, it might be for the better; secondly, for fear that Lady De Benham should take alarm, and follow them to Abbeville. This last, she felt, it would be very difficult for her to bear. For she had resolved within herself that, as far as might be practicable, the sick man should be nursed by her hands only; and the mere thought that she might be dispossessed of her charge by one claiming the privileges of a mother was intolerable to her. For now, at least, he was her own; and he might never, she told herself, be so much her own again.

Yet even at the cost of resigning him—for she knew her own pride too well to doubt that it would be resignation and not sharing—she had no sooner arrived at the conviction that it was her duty to tell all to Lady De Benham, than she sat down to write the letter.

But when she had put at the top of the page—"Hôtel Tête de Bœuf, Abbeville; April 26, 1862;" and under that again—"My dear Lady De Benham," she paused, with the pen in her hand, not knowing how to go on. And, indeed, it was by no means an easy letter to write. The

truth, she felt, must be told, and told quite fairly; yet she wished so to tell it that Lady De Benham should be as little alarmed by it as possible. Then she could not even guess how much of this very truth might, or might not, be already known to her husband's mother. It seemed improbable that, coming home as he did direct from Horta, De Benham should then have concealed, or have been able to conceal, the actual condition of his wound. And yet, on the other hand, he loved his mother so tenderly that if it were possible to endure in silence—

But when her thoughts had traveled thus far, a slight moan in the direction of the bed caused her to look round, and she saw that De Benham's eyes were open, and that he was looking at her. She dropped her pen, and went to him instantly.

"Claudia," he said, "is that you?" And his voice was so weak that it scarcely rose above a whisper.

"It is I. Are you comfortable? Shall I turn your pillow?"

"Give me something to drink."

She gave him something that the doctor had prepared before he left, tempering it first with hot water from the kettle, and lifting his head gently upon her arm.

"What o'clock is it?" he asked, when, having drunk eagerly, he lay back again upon his pillow.

"About ten minutes to one. We are at Abbeville, you know—at the Hôtel Tête de Bœuf."

"Yes; I remember. I fell down just now. I suppose I fainted. Have I been asleep ever since?"

"You have been asleep for some time," replied Claudia.

He had evidently no idea that a night and a day had gone by since the moment of his falling.

"And you are sitting up with me? Why could not Bruno have done that? You must be very tired."

"I am not tired at all. Is your head hot?" And Claudia laid her cool hand upon his burning brow.

"Thank you. You are too good to me!"

And then he moaned again, and closed his eyes, and lay for some moments silent.

"What were you doing when I woke?" he said, presently. "Were you writing letters?"

"No—not writing; only thinking what I should say, if I did write."

"To whom? Not to my mother, Claudia! I charge you not to tell—my mother—anything."

This he said with great earnestness, looking up into her face, as if to see how much she herself knew of the truth.

"Shall I not tell her that you are ill?"

"Not for the world. I will write—myself—to-morrow."

"I fear you will not be well enough to do that," replied Claudia, gently.

"No matter, she must not be alarmed—she must not know— Promise me."

Claudia gave the required pledge very willingly. She certainly desired nothing less than to alarm Lady De Benham.

"I will not let her know you are ill," she said, "till you bid me do so."

This seemed to satisfy him; and presently he dropped off into a feverish doze.

Then Claudia went back to her desk and began a letter to Mr. Hardwicke; but before she had reached the end of the first sentence, it occurred to her that she could not well say any thing to her brother that he might not be at liberty to repeat, supposing Lady De Benham to become impatient and apply to him for news. So, deciding that it was, upon the whole, better to write no letters for a day or two longer, she closed her desk and resumed her old place in the easy-chair beside the bed.

He was now painfully flushed; starting and muttering in his sleep, and perpetually tossing his head from side to side upon the pillow. His hands, too, were hot and restless, and his breath came fast and flutteringly. Still he slept; and Claudia, watching by his side, dozed off herself every now and then for a few minutes at a time—dozed and waked, and dozed and waked again, and saw the gray beginnings of the dawn.

Suddenly, just as the sun had risen and the long, slow rumble of the country carriages began to be audible along the streets, De Benham woke, and said, loudly:

"Not for the world!"

Claudia, lying back in her chair, between sleeping and waking, started upright and found him looking at her with something of wildness in his face.

"She has never known it all this time," he went on, hurriedly. "She must not know it now. I will write myself. But you must promise not to tell her—you must promise!"

"I do promise—I have promised already," replied Claudia, soothingly.

"She has suffered too much—*Liebe Mutter*—and Juliet—Juliet has broken her heart. But my vow—my vow is sacred—I must not break my vow!"

And then he went on incoherently rambling about Benhampton, and Zollenstrasse, and the *Stormy Petrel*, till he fell asleep again.

But Claudia had heard that which startled her into keener watchfulness than ever.

"Who," she asked herself, "was Juliet?—this Juliet who had broken her heart?"

CHAPTER LXVI.

NIGH UNTO DEATH.

DAYS went by—many days—and still De Benham lay in the same state, passing through all the phases of low fever; sometimes burning; sometimes shivering; sometimes sleeping torpidly for hours together; sometimes light-headed, and wandering back in fancy among all kinds of incongruous scenes and people—even back as far as the days of his early boyhood, when he first began to dream of music by the sea and sands of St. Owens. Again, there were intervals when he woke up weak, exhausted, almost speechless, but perfectly conscious of his condition and surroundings. At such times he would strive, in his utter feebleness, to express to Claudia something of gratitude, and even of contrition, apologizing for the trouble and anxiety of which he was the cause, and accusing himself (not without justice) of certain shortcomings in the way of candor and plain-dealing toward herself.

"It is a miserable beginning of married life—for you—Claudia," he would falter. "I had no right—to lead you—into it. I ought to have told you—the truth. But—I hated—to tell it. And besides—I hoped—I believed—I should get well—abroad."

"As you will—as you surely will, when once you are better, and we can move on again," Claudia would answer.

"Ay—if I ever do move on—again. I sometimes—doubt—if I shall."

"Nay, I never doubt it. Monsieur Laportaire never doubts it."

"At all events—I wish—I had not—deceived you."

And then he would turn his face away, and sigh, and Claudia would try to divert his attention into other channels. There was one point, however, to which he always went back in these intervals of consciousness—the necessity, namely, of disguising from Lady De Benham the extent and nature of his illness. That she should know he was laid up (say with a feverish cold), and unable for the present to get beyond Abbeville, was, of course, inevitable; but she must on no account be made uneasy. For this, he said, there would be time enough if he became so much worse that M. Laportaire apprehended danger.

Even when he was too ill to speak of other things, he never forgot to speak of this, and to enforce it with such urgency of look and voice as he had strength for.

By this it will be seen that, however De Benham may have been in doubt at first, he soon knew that Claudia was in possession of his secret. And, indeed, he was now so ill that her knowledge of it was more of a relief to him than an annoyance.

In the mean while she waited upon him, and watched by him with unremitting steadfastness, now and then sharing her vigils with a Sister of Charity sent by M. Laportaire; now and then going out for a few minutes to breathe the open air, when he was asleep; but living for the most part in his room, and at his bedside. And still the quiet town waked and slumbered, and the band played, and the chimes jangled, and the melancholy days succeeded and resembled each other.

These chimes had now become to her as the voices of familiar friends. They played some eight bars of a curious Breton melody—a cheerful tune upon any ordinary instrument, but inexpressibly wild and mournful upon the bells. Listening to them thus at all hours—in the dead of night when every thing was still; by day, above all sounds of life and traffic; in the pauses of the sick man's wanderings; in the intervals of such light sleep as she herself would snatch from time to time—it seemed to Claudia as if they set themselves to the thoughts in her own mind, and echoed them. And then, indeed (for her heart was oppressed with questionings and misgivings), the tune sounded sad and strange enough.

For she saw the fever working its ravages upon him, and his strength ebbing, day by day. She saw that his attacks of wandering were becoming more frequent, his deathlike torpors more prolonged, his periods of consciousness fewer and farther between. And then, gradually—very

gradually, but very surely—a terrible fear began to take possession of her; a fear lest, being scarce a bride, she was destined ere long to become a widow.

And yet it seemed impossible that he should die—that he should die now, and thus; without having lived with her; without knowing that she loved him; without having even begun to love her in return. She could not bring herself to believe that Providence would deal with her so cruelly.

And then, together with these doubts and apprehensions, came two other fears—the fear that it was fast becoming a breach of duty, and even of honor, to keep her husband's mother any longer in ignorance of his condition; and the fear that he had loved and still loved, and would die loving some other woman of whom she had never heard any thing but her name. And her name was Juliet. But who was Juliet? Where had he known her? In England? In Germany? In the Southern States? Had his mother ever seen her? Had he ever been engaged to her? Had he loved her and been false to her, and so "broken her heart?" Juliet—it was a pretty name enough; not a German name—but then the Germans were great in Shakspearean readings, and a German girl might easily be named after one of Shakspeare's heroines. On the whole, Claudia inclined to believe, and wished to believe, that this Juliet, whose name had dropped from De Benham's lips so notably in the one instance, and, since then, some twice or thrice in a more casual and unimportant connection, was in truth but some boyish fancy of his academic days.

At length there arrived one afternoon when, having for more than fifteen hours alternately wandered in his mind and slept feverishly, he came to himself, and, looking at her wistfully, said:

"Claudia—you had better—tell her—to come."

"I will write by to-night's post, if you wish it."

"Ay, and bid her—come—at once."

"I will; but she would be sure to do that in any case."

To this he made no reply, but closed his eyes, wearily, and fell asleep again.

Then Claudia, instead of writing a letter to her mother-in-law, put together a few lines of telegraphic message, every word of which was carefully weighed and chosen.

"Dear Lady De Benham"—(she put "Dear Lady De Benham," hoping thereby to soften the abruptness of the thing, and make it less alarming)—"Temple continues very feverish and weak. No chance of pursuing our journey for some weeks yet. He would like to see you, and asks me to write; but I know you will prefer me to telegraph. Pray lose no time, for your presence will do him more good than any thing. Our courier shall meet you at Boulogne any day and hour you appoint."

This done, and Bruno dispatched with it to the station, her mind felt easier. Then all went on as usual till about nine o'clock, when De Benham roused again and called to her by her name. She was lying on the rug before the fire, half asleep, with her head and arm supported against the sofa; but she heard that whisper instantly.

"Claudia," he said, faintly—so faintly that she had to bend down over him to catch the words distinctly—"you will restore the old place—all the same?"

"We will both restore it—we are both restoring it," she replied, taking his hot and wasted hand in hers.

But of this answer he took no heed.

"You must marry," he said, going on with his own thoughts. "You must marry—again."

She shook her head, and tried to force a smile.

"And your husband—and your children—must take the name of—De Benham. Will you promise?"

"How is it possible? How can I give such promises as these?"

And Claudia, though she spoke very calmly, had to struggle with a sort of tightening in the throat that she was not accustomed to.

"You can do so—for my sake—and your own happiness. Marry—some man—whom you can really love. And if—if I am to die—I shall die—content—knowing that my work—will not have been—all—in vain."

Claudia averted her face, and was for a moment silent.

"I can not pledge myself to marry again," she said, at length; "but this at least I promise—if ever I do marry, it shall be as you wish."

His fingers closed upon hers with a feeble pressure, and something like a smile came upon his face. Then, still holding her hand, he fell asleep again.

All that night, and all the next day, he slept much and waked occasionally; rambling somewhat in his talk from time to time; but for the most part conscious of all that was happening around him. He was now as anxious for his mother to arrive as he had before been anxious to avoid alarming her. Every time he waked he asked if there were yet any news of her. Did Claudia think she was already on the road? Was it likely she would sleep in London on the way? How soon, at the earliest, could she reach Abbeville? To these questions Claudia replied as best she could, soothing his impatience, and calculating by the help of the Railway Guide that Lady De Benham might, if she started by the first morning train from Monmouth, and traveled incessantly, be with them between eight and nine o'clock on the second morning after receiving the message. And this in fact she did; inasmuch as her first telegram (delivered at the Hôtel Tête de Bœuf next evening) announced that she had arrived in London, and was then starting by the night mail for Folkestone.

And now his impatience became so intense and his strength had ebbed so low that Claudia began to dread lest he should sink under the excitement of the meeting. All that last night—the third, namely, from that on which Claudia's summons was dispatched—he kept starting from sleep, counting the hours, and moaning that the dawn would never come. It came at length, however, and when he roused by-and-by from a restless doze the sun was shining. Then he begged that the curtains might be drawn back, and the light admitted.

"What o'clock is it now?" he asked.

"Just six. Your mother is by this time at Boulogne, waiting for her train. She will be here by nine at the latest."

"Still three hours."

"Only three hours. Try to sleep again, and they will soon be gone."

"And Bruno?"

"Bruno went at midnight by the *Petite Vitesse*. He is with her now."

De Benham sighed, and closed his eyes.

"Claudia," he said, presently, "she has loved me with a perfect love—and I—I have loved her—above all the world."

"Is that so?"

And Claudia's thoughts, as she said this, reverted to the unknown Juliet.

"Ay—above all the world. You have been very good to me—Claudia. Be good also to her."

"I will try."

"Thank you—God bless you."

All this he said without again opening his eyes, and then lay so long silent that she thought he had fallen asleep. But he was not asleep. He was only exhausted; too weak to pursue any thing like a train of thought, yet dwelling dreamily on what had last been said.

By-and-by he spoke again—only three words:

"Kiss me, Claudia."

She bent over him quickly, and kissed him on the forehead, putting his hair back gently at the same time with her hand. Then for a moment she let her fingers linger in those long dark meshes, and her lips parted, as if she were about to speak some words of wifelike tenderness. But those words, whatever they might have been, remained unuttered. She turned away instead, and held her peace; and sat down silently in her old place behind the curtain at his bedside.

It was the first time she had kissed him; the first time he had ever asked her to do so. Now and then, in the last weeks of their engagement, he had made some formal pretense of saluting her when they met or parted, coldly brushing her cheek with his mustache; but that was all. He had never kissed her lips, or begged a kiss from hers. Never till now. Once, and once only, had he offered her any thing resembling a genuine caress; and that was when he kissed her arm as they drove from the church-door the morning of their marriage.

Many a time since then, in these long days and nights of watching, she had thought of that little incident; remembered how, for the moment, she was half offended by it; remembered, too, the words and the look by which it was accompanied; ay, and felt again the warmth of his breath and the sudden pressure of his lips. Many a time, also, when he was sleeping, she had longed to give back that kiss—and dared not. Dared not for fear of waking him; would not, had she dared, because of the pride that was rooted in her nature so deeply.

And now that he had said to her, "Kiss me, Claudia," and she had kissed him—what was it worth? What did it imply? Not that he loved her. Not that he was even beginning to love her. Simply that he was grateful—grateful, somewhat, for her care of himself; but grateful, above all, for the promises she had just given to him. And then she told herself that he only cared for her as one able and willing to carry on the main purpose of his life; and to be good to his mother if he were taken from her. In herself, and for herself, she was nothing to him.

These were the thoughts that checked what she might have said, and caused her to turn away when her whole heart was going out to him in pity and tenderness.

Meanwhile De Benham dropped asleep again; and the chimes told off quarter after quarter; and the time drew on to half past eight o'clock, when the early train from Boulogne would be due. Then Claudia went to another room, changed her dress, smoothed her hair, and ordered breakfast to be prepared in the *salon*.

By the time she had done this De Benham was awake and asking for her.

"It is just nine," he said, querulously. "Is she never coming? Am I to die—to die in this place without seeing her again?"

"Hark!" said Claudia, holding up her hand.

There was a sound of rapid wheels turning the corner by the market-place, rumbling under the *port cochère*, drawing up in the court-yard. The next moment Claudia was out in the gallery, and Lady De Benham, pale, breathless, haggard from fatigue and anxiety, was hastening up to the landing at the farther end.

The two women met half-way.

"Is he dead?" said the poor mother, trembling from head to foot.

"No, no—waiting for you—asking for you! This way."

And Claudia took Lady De Benham by the arm as if she were a child; drew her on swiftly to the yellow chamber; saw her dart to the bedside; heard the first long, low sobbing wail of mingled joy and grief; and then, shutting the door upon that love and that greeting in which she had no part, turned away—alone.

CHAPTER LXVII.

TOO LATE.

WHAT with the suspense of expectation and the emotion of meeting, the sick man became suddenly and signally worse about half an hour after Lady De Benham's arrival at the *Tête de Bœuf*. Such factitious strength as fever and excitement had helped to buoy him up with deserted him at a blow. His feeble pulse went down to the lowest ebb, as the barometer drops before a storm; and he fell into a succession of fainting fits, each more prolonged and more obstinate than the last. The work of exhaustion was, in truth, so rapid, that it seemed at one time as if he could not possibly hold out through the day.

All that evening, all that night, his life was despaired of. He was quite unconscious—unconscious, that is to say, of where he was and who he was, and of the people watching by his bed; not unconscious, perhaps, of that strange Shore within sight of which his fragile bark was drifting; not unconscious, perhaps, of those sights and sounds, half from earth and half from heaven, voices of men and voices of angels; that meet and mingle midway across that dread mysterious gulf that flows between the worlds.

Monsieur Laportaire, having been in close attendance upon his patient all the day, sat up with him half the night as well; and in the morning a great physician, for whom he had telegraphed to Paris, arrived by the early train. A very great man in every sense was this famous

physician from Paris. He was tall and he was bulky. He had a great head, and a great beard, and a great voice, and a great idea of his own importance. He wrote his prescription, too, in a handwriting so colossal that it sprawled over the page like the trail of some enormous beetle that had tumbled into the ink-bottle and escaped across the paper.

Now it so happened that De Benham had taken a turn for the better before this eminent man made his appearance. His breathing had become deeper and steadier; a certain warmth had begun to diffuse itself through his veins; a faint glow of returning life had dawned upon the deathlike pallor of his face. It seemed as if the vital wave, having ebbed to its farthest limit, had begun to flow back again. Nature, and youth, and Monsieur Laportaire (and perhaps the prayers of two women who loved him), had saved him, indeed, just at that extreme moment when salvation seemed no longer within reach. And then—in strict accordance with that supreme Law of Contrary that governs things professional—the big man from Paris (having staid a very short time and pocketed a very large fee) got the credit of it.

For some days, however, it could scarcely be said of De Benham that he was even out of danger. He was only out of danger in so far that, supposing him to have no relapses and to be tended with the most unremitting devotion, he might, by God's mercy, still recover. The fever, it is true, had left him; but it had left him as helpless, and almost as unconscious, as an infant. So he slept, and waked, and was fed, and slept again continually; scarce knowing the difference between day and night; aware always of some watchful presence in the room, of some tender hand ever ready to minister to his wants; but so weak, so dreamy, so unobservant of things external, that for the most part he neither knew nor cared to know whether the noiseless footfall and the ready hand were those of wife or mother.

Then, by degrees, that which Claudia had foreseen and dreaded began to be the case. Lady De Benham fell gradually into her own old place, usurping first one, and then another, of those duties upon which her daughter-in-law had come to set so high a price—usurping them, too, with a sense of undisplaced priority—that to Claudia was inexpressibly galling. And yet Lady De Benham, from her own point of view, was justified. For what, she asked herself, was this stranger's claim in comparison with her own? Of what value was that cold vow so lately taken, when weighed against the devotion of half a lifetime? The marriage, she knew but too well, had been a marriage of convenience, of interest, of ambition—no true marriage in the sight of Heaven; no irrevocable marriage, as yet, in the sight of man. Whereas she—was she not his mother? Had she not nursed him in sickness and adored him in absence? Had she not lived for him, prayed for him, struggled for him through as many years of exile and poverty as might twice outnumber the weeks of his loveless engagement to Claudia Hardwicke?

It must be admitted, in common justice to Lady De Benham, that if she had dreamed how her son's wife had come to love him, not for his rank, but for himself, she would have acted differently. Hard as might have been the task,

she would have yielded those privileges which now she believed to be reasonably and rightfully her own. But of this love she knew nothing; and so it came about that before she had been two days at Abbeville, she had taken the patient altogether into her own hands.

And Claudia allowed her to do so; yielding more and more ground at each fresh encroachment; saying nothing; making no sign; withdrawing silently into the citadel of her pride; and, as she had all along foreseen she should do if it came to this, resigning those rights which she would condescend neither to dispute nor to share.

And now, as the days went by and De Benham began by little and little to take a firmer hold upon life, so she had to endure the unspeakable disappointment of seeing how, in all things, and for all things, he turned to his mother instead of to herself. If he thirsted, if his feet were cold, if his head was not high enough, it was toward Lady De Benham that he looked when he complained of the inconvenience; it was she who held the cup of tisane, or spread the shawl, or placed the pillow. If he fancied to be read to, it was—"Mutter, dear, another chapter of that Tauchnitz novel;" or, "Mutter, dear, do you remember where you left off yesterday in that poem of Browning's?" And then Lady De Benham would bring the book to his bedside and read to him, holding his hand the while, till he would fall asleep. Nor was this all. When his mother fetched him this or that, or arranged any little thing for his comfort, he would smile at her for it, looking pleased and peaceful, but saying nothing. Yet, if Claudia did the most trivial thing, he never failed to thank her for it, as he might have thanked a stranger. This pained her keenly.

"Don't thank me," she said, one day when, seeing that he was troubled by the light, she drew down the blind.

"Why should I not thank you?" he asked, with a passing gleam of surprise.

"Because it sounds as if you thought it gave me trouble."

"But it does give you trouble."

"I do not think so."

"Ah, but—but I should be most ungrateful, if—"

He hesitated, and looked uncomfortable.

"You do not thank your mother," said Claudia, smiling.

"No; but then she is my mother, and it seems only natural that she should do these things."

Claudia iced over instantly.

"True," she said, coldly, "I observe the difference."

After that she never again desired him not to thank her.

It was just at this time, when the constraint that he felt toward his wife was constantly manifesting itself in trifles, that De Benham's love for his mother seemed to gain intensely from day to day. If she left the room, ten to one but his first word to Claudia would be something in her praise. When she came in, his whole countenance would brighten. His voice when he spoke to her had a softness, and his smile a sweetness, that Claudia never detected in them at other times.

"It is so good, *Mütterchen*, to see you sitting there," he would sometimes say. "When you first came, and I used to wake and find you by my side, I could hardly believe it was not all a dream."

Another day, when she had been reading:

"I don't care what book you take up," he said, tenderly. "Your voice is like Cordelia's, 'ever soft, gentle, and low—an excellent thing in woman.' I often listen to the voice alone, and not a bit to what you are reading."

Now there was nothing little or envious in Claudia Hardwicke's nature. Her faults were masculine in their kind. She was proud; she was ambitious; she was hard; but she was not naturally jealous, or even exacting. These things, however, tried her severely. She put them from her at first, telling herself that Lady De Benham was the best of mothers, and De Benham the best of sons, and that it was her duty to rejoice in their affection. But strive as she might to attain unto such rejoicing, it was impossible, as time went on, that she should not suffer, and suffer bitterly. She must have suffered if even she had not loved him. She must have suffered in the mere sense of solitude and exclusion; in the daily and hourly sight of an affection in which she had no part; in the knowledge that she was just the third person whose presence was a restraint upon them both. But loving him as cold and haughty women do love when their turn comes—silently, passionately, profoundly—great sorrow fell upon her as the weeks went on.

For, the more she suffered, the more she loved; and the more she loved, the more cold and distant she became.

As De Benham progressed toward recovery (and that progress was very slow indeed) she fell into solitary habits, going out alone in the early mornings and again in the afternoons; attending most of the Cathedral services; exploring the quaint old medieval town; and leaving the mother and son to themselves for hours together. For it was now May, and the days were long, and warm, and bright; and Abbeville, however it may have been improved into commonplace of late, was then as curious and picturesque a town as any in France. Claudia soon came to know the place by heart—all the tortuous alleys of antique gabled houses with overhanging upper stories; all the windings of the sluggish, Flemish-looking canals and no less sluggish river; the curious bridges, some of wood, and some of stone; the neglected gardens and tottering summer-houses on the banks of the Somme; the dilapidated churches that seemed to have purposely hidden themselves in the darkest court-yards and most out-of-the-way corners of the town; the ancient fortifications, now converted into pleasant slopes all green with grass and silvered over with daisies; the sleepy barges; the primitive Old-World *charrettes*, some drawn by oxen, that came rumbling in with country produce every morning; the wizened old women in their black hoods and cloaks; the men in their *sabots* and blouses; the *sergents de ville* in their cocked hats and yellow facings; the cripple who sold candles and little rosaries in the Cathedral porch; the soldiers; the beggars; the railway omnibus; the sights, and smells, and noises of the place—she knew these all familiarly ere long; even

passing the gates at times and wandering along the poplar-bordered roads leading to the station, to St. Valery, and to the field of Cressy, where the great battle was fought five hundred years before.

But picturesque as the place was, Claudia was now too restless and too unhappy to derive any real pleasure from these explorations. The beauty was there, and she observed it; but that was all. It moved her to no delight—it roused in her no thankfulness. To the proud, solitary woman wandering hither and thither with her silent anguish ever shut up in her heart, what joy could there be in effects of light and shadow, of architectural detail, of color and combination; in gabled roof, and curious iron-work, and reflections of arches in still waters?

The pleasantest sight of each day, however, in her eyes, was the great square in front of the Cathedral, which (besides the general market held there once a week) used to bloom like a garden every morning with fresh fruits and flowers and early vegetables. There the country women sat behind their stalls under parti-colored umbrellas, "beautiful, Dædalian," like variegated sunflowers of gigantic growth; and the great old gray Cathedral filled all one side of the place, half in shadow, half in sunshine—a mountain of carved stone, and painted glass, and sumptuous tracery.

Claudia spent much of her time in the Cathedral. The doors were always open, and she used to go in and out as she pleased; resting there when she was tired; musing and dreaming up and down the shadowy aisles; listening to the friendly chimes; kneeling like others at service time, and saying her own prayers to the rolling music of the organ and the chanting of the choir. The verger came to know her by sight ere long, and, taking her for as good a Catholic as the rest, used to sprinkle her with his asperge when she went out with the congregation.

Meanwhile De Benham dragged on through all the stages of gradual convalescence, being carried first from the bed to the sofa in the middle of the day—then sitting up to dinner in an easy-chair—then getting as far as the adjoining *salon*—then being wheeled into the gallery when the day was warm enough and the sun was shining. By-and-by, as his strength returned, he drove out daily, and even walked with the support of an arm to lean upon and the help of a stick. His wound, also, healed as it had never healed till now, and promised soon to give him no further trouble.

Abbeville, however, is not such a place as an invalid would choose to stay in when once he was strong enough to move elsewhere; and as De Benham got better he longed to escape from the street noises, the chimes, and the comfortless hotel. M. Laportaire recommended one of the north coast watering-places—Boulogne, or Calais, or Dieppe. De Benham himself desired to push on to one of the Swiss baths—Albisbrunn, or Pfeffers, or Locche. But as yet he was too weak to undertake a long journey, or encounter prolonged fatigue of any kind. Claudia, listening meanwhile to this project and that, waited to see how soon her mother-in-law would propose to return to the cottage near Benhampton.

At length there came a morning when, Lady De Benham having gone out (it might be purposely) into the town, De Benham asked his wife

how she would like to spend some weeks at Spa, in Belgium.

"I should object to no place that would be likely to do you good," replied Claudia.

"I have a notion that I should like Spa," he said.

"I have heard that it is pretty; and not wanting in amusements."

"And it is on our way to Switzerland and the Rhine."

"Yes—that is some recommendation."

He hesitated; looked down; fidgeted with a paper-knife and a book.

"You would not, I suppose, enjoy it less," he said, "if my mother accompanied us?"

The question was an awkward one, and awkwardly put. He might have said the same thing in half a dozen better ways; above all, without making it so difficult for Claudia to reply to him.

She paused—not because she was taken by surprise, for she had foreseen something of this request; but that she might weigh her words before uttering them.

"What you will enjoy most is now, I think, the point to be considered," she said at length.

De Benham looked at her anxiously. He observed that she spoke with some constraint; but her face told nothing.

"I wish nothing that you—do not wish," he said.

But Claudia would express neither inclination nor disinclination. There was nothing in the world that she desired so little as to have Lady De Benham for a permanent travelling companion; but this she was determined not to say. Neither would she affect, in the smallest degree, a willingness that she could not feel.

"For how long do you propose to stay there?" she asked.

"At Spa? Oh, a few weeks—perhaps five or six; till I am strong enough to go on in earnest."

Then Claudia was again silent, asking herself what she should do next—what she should say. Supposing Lady De Benham to spend those five or six weeks with them at Spa, would it end there? And if it did not end there, where would it end? What should then prevent her from going on with them up the Rhine, and even into Switzerland? And if to Switzerland, why not to Italy? Would it not be well, and right, and wise, to ask at once where the limit of her visit was to be drawn? She was to live with them at Benhampton. That had been settled long since; but they were to have spent a year together first. And now, perhaps, they might never be together—that is to say, really together, quite alone, learning to love each other and make each other happy. Ought she not to say something of this danger, and of the evil that might arise to both of them, if they were not careful to avert it? Yet how could she urge these things upon him? How could she ask him to travel alone with her, if he did not himself desire such close companionship? Had they at any time stood in more lover-like relationship toward each other, it would have been less difficult. Had they been alone together for even one short week before he fell ill, it would have been comparatively easy. But they were still strangers—as much strangers as ever; and his illness, though at first it promised to draw them nearer to each other, had ended by widening the gulf between them.

There, however, was the gulf; and there, also, was Claudia's pride. Her common-sense, her convictions, her love, all bade her speak while the opportunity was to her hand. Her pride tied her tongue and constrained her to silence. How could she speak? Would it not be like asking for his love?

These arguments, which take so long to tell, chased each other through her mind so rapidly that they seemed to come simultaneously. But this last question came last, and decided her. De Benham, seeing only her grave, pale face and averted eyes, knew nothing, guessed nothing of the conflict within. Almost before he had observed her silence that conflict was over.

"Shall I then invite my mother to go on with us?" he said.

"If you please."

"Or, perhaps, if it came from you—"

Claudia rose abruptly.

"Many thanks," she said, with a smile of irrepressible bitterness. "I think that invitation will come best from yourself."

And with this, she swept past his chair and into the adjoining room.

Now De Benham saw that smile, and a sudden misgiving came upon him. Had Claudia conceded this point unwillingly? Was it unwise in him to have asked it? Could it be, in any way, construed by her into a lack of courtesy, or of due regard, on his part? Was he not bound, now if ever, to consider what would be most agreeable to her?

Disturbed and perplexed, he waited a few moments; then rose and followed her.

"Claudia," he said, tapping at the door.

But Claudia did not answer.

"Claudia—are you there?"

Finding that she was still silent, he opened the door and looked in; but the room was empty and the wardrobe open, and the door leading to the gallery ajar.

"Ah, well!" he muttered, half aloud, as he dropped back again into his chair, "perhaps it is best so. If she cared for me it would be another matter."

And then Lady De Benham came in, having passed Claudia in the court-yard, and his first words made the thing irrevocable.

"You must come with us, *Mutter*, dear," he said, eagerly. "It is all settled."

"But are you quite sure—"

"That I could not endure to part from you? Yes—quite sure. Ah, if you only knew how I longed for you when I was so bad! My desperate fear was lest I should die without seeing you."

Then Lady De Benham sat down beside her son and took him in her arms, and drew his head to her bosom as if he were a little child.

"Are you happy, my son?" she said, tenderly. "Are you happy?"

"Happy!" he repeated. "What is happiness? To live for one object, and attain it? If so, I am happy. I made a vow, and I have kept it. I thank God that he has enabled me to keep it."

"But is that all?"

"Nay—I have yet more. *Mutter*, dear, I have you."

"And your wife?"

"My wife? Yes—I have my wife. We esteem each other. We respect each other. We

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have united our interests and exchanged certain advantages, and are both, I trust, so far content with our lot. But as regards love, we have never dreamed of such a possibility—and never shall dream of it. "Tis not in the bond."

"If two persons who really esteem each other go together through life, it is strange indeed if that esteem does not become love in the course of the journey."

De Benham shook his head.

"My journey," he said, "lies through a desert."

In the mean while Claudia had taken her hat and gone swiftly out, turning as usual toward the market-place. The Cathedral doors were standing open. In the market all was noise and sunshine; in the church all was silence and shadow. She went in, sat down in a dark and distant corner, and buried her face in her hands.

It was all over. The supreme moment, she told herself, was gone by. She might have spoken, and she had not spoken; and now it was too late. Now, too surely, his love and his confidence would never be hers. Now, too surely, that gulf would go on widening between them, never to be bridged over in this world. And then, as Claudia thought of the life that lay before her—of the love that would never be spoken and the solitude that would never be shared—a dreadful sense of hopelessness fell upon her; a hopelessness so crushing, so profound, that it seemed to deaden heart and brain within her.

Poor woman! she had thought to be happy, according to her ideal. She had bargained for position and a title; she had not bargained for love. And Love had come—Love the Nemesis, Love the Avenger—and the things for which she had sold herself were turned to dust and ashes on her lips. What cared she now for that coronet which once stood to her as the outward and visible type of all human felicity? What was it now that she had married a lord, and that her servants called her "my lady"? She would have given it all—coronet, title, and the wealth she had paid for them—in exchange for the love that would never be hers. And was this, she asked herself, the punishment of her ambition?

She sat for a long time in the church, taking no heed of the quarters as they chimed themselves away; conscious of nothing but her own despair. By-and-by the choristers met in the choir to practice, and a low, melancholy sound of chanting echoed down the aisles. Then, for the first time, tears came to her relief, and she wept long and silently.

When at length the singing was over and she had recovered her self-control, she rose and went out into the town and past the gates, taking a long walk into the open country beyond. Here she sat down for a while on a bench by the roadside, took off her hat, and let the cool air blow upon her face; nor did she go back to the hotel till she felt sure that no trace remained to show that she had been weeping.

That same evening De Benham received, among other letters from England, the following from Archibald Blyth:

"PRIOR'S WALK, May 26, 1862.

"MY DEAR DE BENHAM,—I am heartily glad to learn that you are so much better. Mr. Hardwicke informs me that you will be resuming your journey very shortly.

"This is good news indeed, and I can not tell you how glad I am to hear it. I have news for you too—the best of news, to my mind. I am engaged to be married; and when I tell you who the lady is, I am sure you will agree with me in thinking that I am the luckiest fellow on this side of the Atlantic.

"The lady is Miss Alleyne. When I see how beautiful, and clever, and amiable she is, I can hardly believe in my own good fortune. That she is ever so much too good for me I know as well as you do; but since she is willing to put up with me, and as I love her with all my heart, I suppose there is nothing more to be said on that head. Mr. Hardwicke has kindly given me to understand that he intends still further to improve my position in the house before long; and I have great hopes of being married before Christmas.

"Pray remember me to my cousin Claudia, and believe me, my dear De Benham, with heartiest good wishes for your health and happiness,

"Your faithful friend,

"ARCHIBALD BLYTH.

"P.S.—I don't know whether I ought to give you your title, and call my cousin Lady De Benham. If I have done wrong, please forgive the omission."

"Here is a letter that will interest you, Claudia," said De Benham, handing it to her across the table; for they were at dinner when the post came in. "It is from Archie—and he is engaged to be married."

Claudia read the letter, and returned it.

"Poor Archie!" she said. "His letters are just like himself. Who is the lady?"

"She is the daughter of that Alleyne who painted 'The Athens of Pericles,' which your brother bought out of last year's Exhibition."

"And is she all that he says?"

"Yes; she is pretty—more than pretty. And certainly clever."

Here Lady De Benham, having read the letter in her turn, joined in the conversation.

"I never heard of this Miss Alleyne before," she said. "Where have you seen her, Temple?"

"We met her—Archie and I—ages ago, at Chillingford, a little place on the Wye, that time when we made our pedestrian tour, you know, and I first went to Benhampton. We all happened to be staying at the same inn—it was a mere village, and there was only one in the place. Such a primitive little inn as it was, too! Archie and I used to eat off wooden platters and get our dinners in the kitchen."

All this he said with apparent ease and indifference—with almost too much ease, and too much indifference, as it happened; for Claudia guessed the truth.

"Is the lady's name Juliet?" she asked.

De Benham flushed scarlet.

"That is—I believe—Miss Alleyne's name," he said, with evident embarrassment. "What do you know of her?"

"Nothing," replied Claudia, coldly. "Nothing but her name."

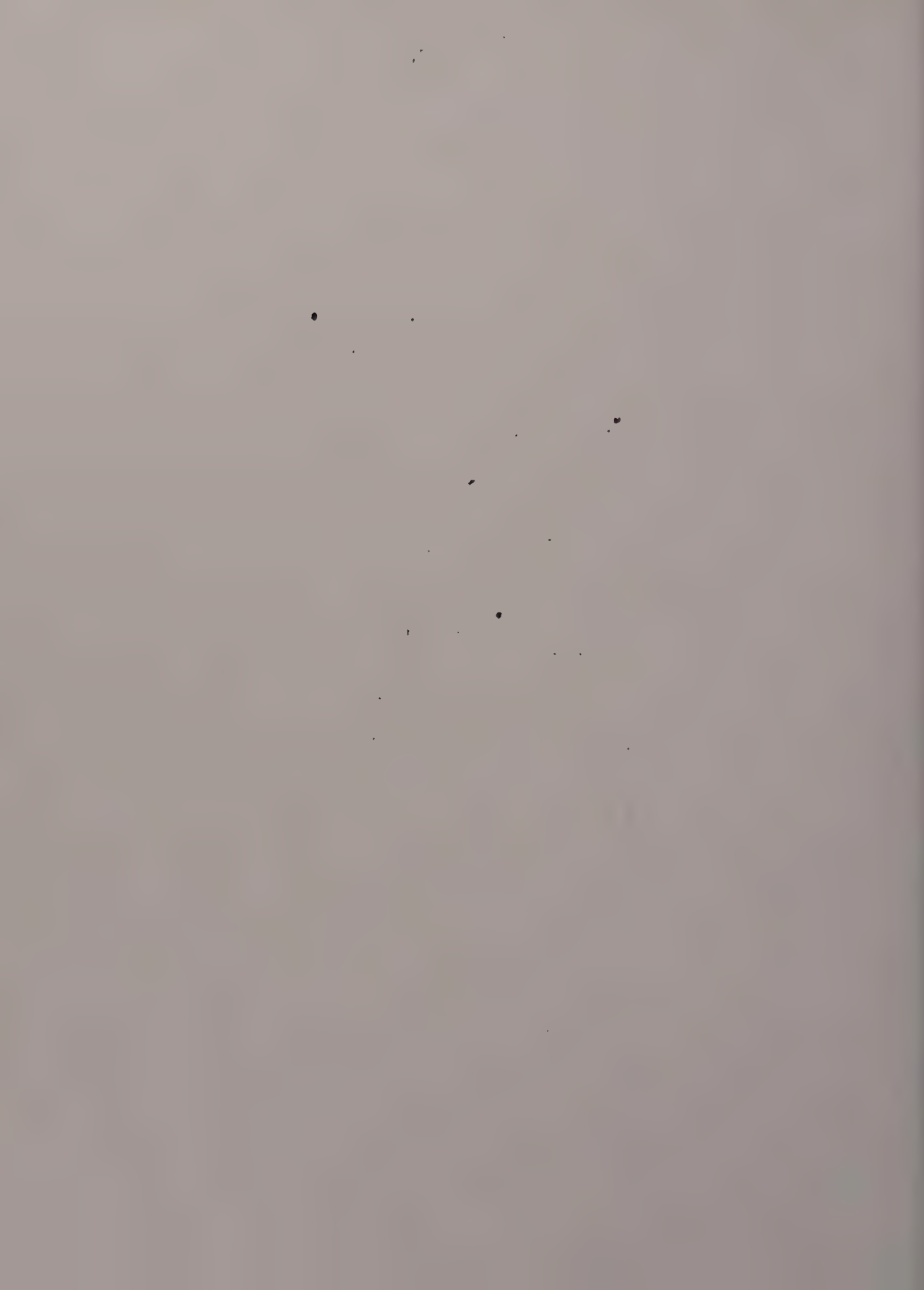
"You will congratulate Mr. Blyth, I suppose, by return of post," said Lady De Benham.

To which De Benham replied that he was very glad to hear of Archie's happiness—very glad indeed; and that he would write his letter that evening.

But, somehow, the letter did not get written that evening, nor till several evenings after: for De Benham, although he had, of all men living, the least right to feel aggrieved by the turn things had taken, did feel aggrieved, nevertheless, and told himself again and again that in this matter Archie and Juliet had not treated him well. By becoming engaged to each other, it seemed to him as if they had entered into some kind of league and covenant against him. That Juliet Alleyne should some day console herself with another was reasonable—perhaps. That Archie should marry and be happy was meet and right in the highest degree. But that Juliet Alleyne should console herself with Archie, and that Archie should wed with Juliet Alleyne—this was a consummation to which De Benham could in no wise reconcile himself with a good grace. By degrees, however, the sense of soreness wore off, and he succeeded in writing a letter of congratulation sufficiently cordial and sufficiently sincere; and as a letter perfect in its way.

In the mean while, partly by road and partly by rail, stopping at Arras, Mons, and Liège by the way, they moved on gradually to Spa, where they arrived toward the end of the first week in June, just as the fashionable season began. At what hotel they put up; how long they remained there; how De Benham, gaining health and strength by slow but sure degrees, became strong enough as the summer and autumn progressed, to do the Rhine and Switzerland and the Italian lakes, so getting well on the road to Rome before Christmas; how his mother constantly went on with them "a little farther," till at last there arose no more question as to her going or staying; how all went smoothly, and yet all went wrong; how they two who had vowed to become one flesh went on their long journey, together yet divided, wedded yet strangers—all this can be conceived, but need not be told.

For here our story ends. To those who may object that such ending is unsatisfactory, and that the heroes and heroines of romance should either die or be happy according to the received order of things, it may be answered that life is unsatisfactory, and death still more so; and that those men and women who neither die nor are happy constitute the great overwhelming majority upon earth. For the most part, apparently, the things of this life turn out neither wholly well nor wholly ill. Each star has its night side, and every cloud its silver lining. Prosperity is not all success; conquest is not all triumph; love is seldom an unmixed good or an unqualified evil. We have seen how Temple De Benham desired riches and Claudia Hardwicke rank; and how both attained the summit of their ambition. If, being successful, they were not also happy, then their story adds but another testimony to the truth of that maxim which tells us that to those whom the gods chastise they grant the desires of their heart.



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